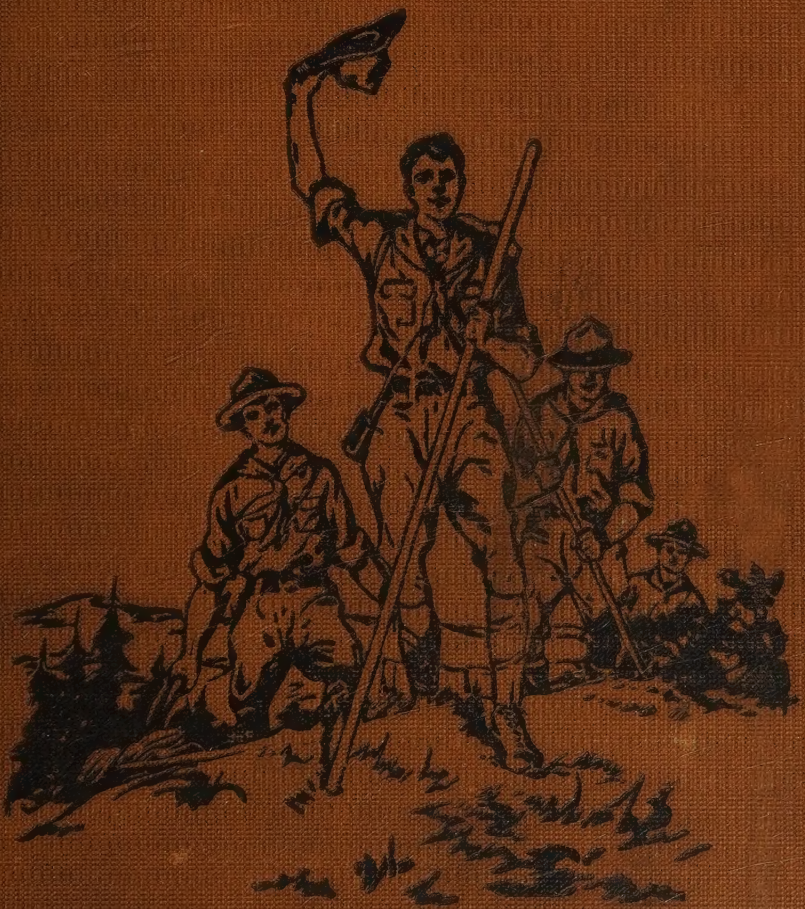
THE BOY SCOUTS OF ROUND TABLE PATROL



CHARLES HENRY LERRIGO

RICHARD
GRALEY

CHS-90c

"I'M GOING AFTER THAT FELLOW, SHOUTED SETH, AS HE REACHED THE BOY. *Frontispiece.* *See page 92.*

THE BOY SCOUTS
OF
ROUND TABLE PATROL

BY
CHARLES HENRY LERRIGO

ILLUSTRATED BY
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THE BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

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Boy Scouts of Round Table Patrol

CHAPTER I

SIX HUNDRED DOLLARS A DAY

"Any mail for us, Mr. Lewis?"

"I'm afraid there isn't much that you want, Seth," replied the village postmaster to Seth Payson. "Here's a letter for your father from the Bank of Commerce, and your copy of the *Farmer's Mail.* That's all."

"Thank you, Mr. Lewis," said Seth, bravely covering his disappointment. "I'll be hurrying home before the rain gets heavier."

The rain was descending in heavy sheets before Seth reached the Payson farm. It was growing dark, too. He ran his market truck into the big barn and made a quick dash for the house.

"Any mail, Seth?" called his mother.

"Not what you're expecting, mother," replied Seth. "I wish I could get hold of that fellow

Grindley for a few minutes. I'd get that money he owes us. But the notice from the bank is here. They expect father to pay six hundred and five dollars on the first."

"I don't see where we ever shall get it if Grindley doesn't send it," said Mrs. Payson, coming in from the kitchen. "I just felt all the time that father was making a mistake sending his stock to a commission man he knew so little about. But so many folks were doing it. And the Robinsons said he made splendid sales for them last year. Father has gone over to Robinsons' to see if they have heard anything. He'll feel pretty blue when he sees this notice from the bank, when he has no money with which to meet it."

"Cheer up, mother! They know we're honest. I'll do something to earn that money myself. Father won't need me very badly this summer. Maybe I can sell books. George Binns made a lot of money that way last summer."

"But George is a young man and you're only a boy."

"I'm past fifteen and a junior in high school. Father ought to get some help from me."

"Anything in the paper?"

"I haven't read it all yet. There's a piece

that's mighty interesting about a missing boy who has a fortune waiting for him whenever he turns up. The paper has it all figured out. He gets forty-two cents every minute that he lives, twenty-five dollars and twenty cents every hour, and six hundred and four dollars and eighty cents every day. Think of it! Just one day of his money would clear up our troubles. I think I could get the twenty cents to make the six hundred and five. Wouldn't it be fine, mother?"

"Wouldn't what be fine?" asked his mother, coming to herself with a start. "Oh, you mean if you had what that boy has. No good ever comes from envying other people, Seth. There's no place in life so good for you as your own."

"I didn't mean for more than one day," explained Seth. "No, sir, I have no desire to be any one else but Seth Payson. And I certainly do not want to be this Enderscot Albuth boy. Why, he doesn't know enough to go and get his money when it's all counted out and ready for him."

"Not for a day, Seth, not even a bad day like this. Listen! Some one is tooting an automobile horn."

Seth turned to look out of the window.

"It's some one stuck at the foot of the hill,

mother," he said. "I suppose I'll have to go down and see what's the matter."

"Yes, indeed! Put on your boots and your slicker and take the team. Maybe it's the Robinsons bringing your father home. Hurry!"

"Guess I won't need them, mother. It has stopped raining, but that downpour must have washed the road out pretty badly."

The patient horses splashed steadily down the hill, with the jingling of loose harness and the rattling of the chains that Seth had trailed on for pulling purposes.

"Something wrong with your car?" called the boy, as he came close.

"The machine is all right but the wheels don't do anything but skid round and round," replied the driver. "My chains were old. I fixed them with ropes, but I seem to have lost them."

"Too bad!" said Seth. "It usually is bad business to make repairs on machinery with rope. I have a stout cable and hook here, though. I think I can pull you to the top of the hill."

The strong farm team made short work of the job, and soon pulled the car to the top, halting at the Payson gate.

"Fine work," said the stranger, "fine work! A

ten-dollar bank note would be about right for the little job, would it?"

"No, sir," said Seth. "Forget it. The Paysons don't do business that way."

"Splendid! It's your Southern hospitality, is it not? But you must let me"—

"No, sir," objected Seth. "We are a Southern family and we're all strong for hospitality, but anyway, I'm a Scout, and this is my good turn."

"I understand, for I know about Scouts in England. A jolly good turn, done jolly well every day —that's the rule. But Mr. Scout, how about a little provender for man and beast?"

"I think my mother will give you your supper."

"And the boy back here?"

The stranger reached an arm into the back of the car and pulled forth a wretched-looking specimen of a boy.

"Judging by his looks, he won't eat the cupboard bare," said Seth. "I'll pull your car under cover. You go on into the house and mother will look after you."

When Seth entered the house, after some little time in caring for his team, he found that the stranger had already made himself well acquainted with Mrs. Payson, and had told her a great deal

more of his affairs than he had vouchsafed to Seth.

"What do you think, Seth? This gentleman is Mr. Eastcome, who owns that splendid place in the Ozarks, where Doctor Pingree is superintendent."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean," said Seth. "I suppose you mean Ping Pong's uncle, Doctor Pingree, but I don't know about him except that he runs a sanitarium somewhere."

"Well, it's down in the Ozarks. Mr. Eastcome owns the place. He is driving down to it and he was coming through Bushville so as to have a word with Doctor Pingree's folks on his way."

"I'm mighty glad I pulled him out of the mud," said Seth. "And I reckon he'd better stay with us all night and go on in the morning."

"You are very kind, my boy, and I'm certain no one could show more of your Southern hospitality than you are showing," said Mr. Eastcome.

"We are very glad to do it," affirmed Mrs. Payson. "You mustn't talk about Southern hospitality; it's just being Christian to a neighbor. And perhaps you'll tell us all about the Ozarks."

"I'm afraid I haven't much to tell. I must confess that I'm a poor tenderfoot who doesn't know very much, for I have made only occasional visits.

However, there is quite a story about the place."

"Please tell us while we wait for Mr. Payson to come to supper," begged Mrs. Payson.

"An uncle of mine started the estate many years ago," said Mr. Eastcome. "I never knew him very well, but from all accounts he fell a good bit short of having a chummy disposition. In fact, he went there because he wanted to get away from society. But he had no intention of living in hermit style. He had loads of money and was perfectly willing to spend it so long as he was the chief beneficiary. So he bought a great tract of land in the southern Ozarks, where the range touches the Arkansas River, and there he built a place that he called Wildheath Lodge.

"It didn't look like a lodge to the natives. In fact, they promptly called it the Palace and that name has stuck. It is still called the Palace, though it is used as a kind of private hospital for nervous people, in this country commonly called a sanitarium.

"Well, this uncle of mine didn't get along very well in his palace, though he had everything heart could wish excepting the good will of the neighbors he professed to despise. Finally the thing happened that is just as sure to come to rich men as poor

men—he died. Not long after that I came over from England to see what could be done with the estate. I found the Palace terribly run down, but I had it repaired and slightly altered, and turned it into a sanitarium. I placed a doctor in charge.

"There was a lot of ground that had been inclosed for a park. I left that as a recreation ground for the sanitarium. But there was a lot more in which my uncle had been cultivating fruits and berries. I put good men in charge of this and left.

"I haven't been so keen after the place as a real sharp Yankee might be. I have gone down once or twice a year, and each visit made me surer that I haven't always had the right kind of doctors to superintend the sanitarium or the right kind of gardeners to look after the orchard. The chief trouble is that the natives had always felt a strong dislike for the Palace and all that went with it in the very early days, and they have never forgotten their feeling. I can hire gardeners and men to go down and work for me for high wages, but I never can secure the extra help I need to gather the crop. So even if the crop is good, it is often wasted. And the people damage the trees and vent their spite in all manner of ways. I'm going down there to live now and I hope for better things."

"It ought to be a good place," said Seth. "We get fine strawberries from that region, and I guess our peaches come from there, too, don't they, mother?"

"There are good strawberries at Wildheath Fruit Ranch," said Mr. Eastcome, "and I have the most beautiful peach orchard in the country. It only needs development, and that means personal attention such as it has never had. Do you know anything about horticulture, my boy?"

"A little," said Seth. "At least, enough to know that it means hard work. Father and I have made out pretty well with cherries and apples. We shipped a hundred barrels of apples last year."

"Then you know a great deal about it," said Mr. Eastcome. "And I judge that you are at least on speaking terms with hard work."

"Better than that, Mr. Eastcome," said Mrs. Payson, smiling. "Seth is on such good terms with hard work that they never have any words at all."

"Well, Seth, may I ask one question more? I like your looks, I like your ways, and I like the smile you carry in your face. Now, do you know anything about a motor truck?"

"There is one in our barn right now that I know

so well I could go over it from steering wheel to crank case in the dark," replied Seth.

"Good! I just felt in my heart that this misadventure was going to bring me some good. It so often happens. You are the very boy I want, and your truck is no doubt the very truck. Will you sign on with me for four months' work at Wildheath Fruit Ranch, for you and your truck?"

Such a question, coming so unexpectedly, took Seth's breath away. Instead of answering he looked at his mother.

"You are almost a man, Seth," said she. "I am willing that you should make your own decision."

"I will pay for the services of yourself and your truck a hundred and fifty dollars a month, besides furnishing you board and the upkeep of the truck," added Mr. Eastcome.

"I'll accept your offer, Mr. Eastcome," said Seth, "but there's a condition I would like to make, if it is possible."

"Name it."

"Could you pay me now, in advance? The truck will be your security."

Mr. Eastcome looked squarely at the boy, as if he would read his most secret purpose.

"The thing is possible, and it shall be done," he

said. "Now, tell me why you make this unusual demand."

"The money is to go right into this envelope, sir, together with a five-dollar bill that I happen to have already. This notice came from the bank to-day to tell my father he must pay six hundred and five dollars. He's coming, right now, sir. I can hear him. When I give him this envelope, the money and the notice will be together. It is the first big thing I've ever been able to do in all my life."

Mr. Payson entered just then and there followed the excitement and joy of the great announcement.

"Seth will be a good boy for you," said Mr. Payson. "I shall miss him, but his contract with you lifts a tremendous load from me. Not that I would have feared it, for God has always given me a way out of my troubles. Let us have that poor boy in from the kitchen now and all give thanks for this fine supper."

"I think the boy will prefer to stay out there," said Mr. Eastcome. "He is a poor waif I picked up a couple of days ago. He is very much afraid of everybody, afraid to eat in company, afraid to speak above a whisper. I hope to put some cheer and courage into him at my ranch, but he isn't the

kind of material from which I can expect much. I'd give a lot for a couple more like Seth."

"I think I can help you to a couple," said Seth, as they sat at table. "Doctor Pingree's nephew, Pingree Lewis, is about my age. Old Ping Pong would like to work for you this summer; and he has a chum, Pansy Flowers, who is big and husky and would make a great worker."

"To-morrow I'll engage both of them," said Mr. Eastcome. "Then if we can get our poor waif stirred up a little I shall have four new helpers. Five of us can do wonders, I'm sure."

"Yes, sir," agreed Seth. "It takes only eight to make a patrol."

CHAPTER II

A MIDNIGHT RACE

Seth Payson was not ready for sleep when bedtime came on that eventful night. The rest of the family had retired. A room was found for Mr. Eastcome, for the Payson home was a comfortable, substantial farmhouse, ample in its accommodations.

"Where will you put Scotty, the boy I brought with me?" asked Mr. Eastcome of Seth.

"Scotty can have a room all to himself, or he can come in with me, whichever he prefers," replied Seth.

"He's frightened of his own shadow, apparently," said Mr. Eastcome. "He has been badly treated, and I fear that he's queer in the head—a shingle loose, as you Yankees might say. I've taken a great fancy to the poor lad and I hope that between us we can pluck some of the fear out and help him back to balance."

"If he's afraid of things, perhaps I'd better take

him in with me," suggested Seth. "Perhaps he will open up to me and get rid of some of his freak notions."

"You mean he may tell you what he fears, so that we may help him. That is a good thought, lad. But I must warn you that what little he has told me is quite improbable. If he says things that are unbalanced, just let them come in one ear and out the other. But don't argue with him. I know something about dealing with these witless ones. Don't argue. Let them have their own way."

"Scotty shall tell any story he pleases," agreed Seth. "I'll just make him feel easy."

The boy seemed relieved to find that he was to be in the same room with big Seth.

"I guess nobody wouldn't carry you off very easily," he said.

"I guess they would not," replied Seth.

Even though it was quite late Seth found that sleep did not come very quickly. Now that the storm had passed, the night was very beautiful. An early moon shed enough light to outline the familiar trees, the outbuildings, the road in front of the house. The fragrance of early spring was in the air. Eager though he was to go on this ex-

pedition, Seth felt a keen reluctance to leave all these homely things that were so lovely in his eyes. He had been born in this old farmhouse and had never been away more than a night or two at a time in all his life. He saw visions of adventure beckoning to him. He was glad to go, for he had all the natural ambition of a vigorous boy. Yet there were many things that pulled at his affections and made him loath to leave.

He had been standing at his window, fully dressed. The boy Scotty was in bed and apparrently asleep. Seth stole quietly from the room, down the stairs, and out to the front gate. From there he looked down the long hill up which his team had drawn Mr. Eastcome's automobile that afternoon. At the bottom of the hill ran the creek in which he had played from his childhood. He could not see it; but as it surged along, swollen by the recent spring rains, it made its own noises of the night. The strip of woods that ran along either bank of the creek had been Seth's favorite play place ever since his feet had been big enough to carry him to its shadows. There was a big maple that overlooked the other trees so definitely that it was prominent even by moonlight. That maple was Seth's lookout, his hiding place, his treasure house,

his friend of the woods. Since he was not at all sleepy, he would walk down and give the old fellow a friendly pat, at the very least.

Perhaps Seth was gone half an hour, perhaps longer. It was a quiet, mild, lovely night; wholly enjoyable, in spite of the sodden earth. He was creeping quietly back to the house, thinking that now he would sleep, when he was startled to see a slight form slip out of the front door, which he had left open, and start along the road to Bushville.

It was Scotty, without doubt. It could be no one else. Seth repressed an impulse to call to the boy and started swiftly and silently in chase.

Scotty did not seem to expect pursuit, and Seth was able to get within a hundred yards before his approach was noticed. Then an incautious splash in a roadside puddle betrayed him. Scotty gave one frightened glance behind and sped away like a frightened rabbit.

Seth smiled to himself as he settled down for a dash in pursuit. There was no need for further caution. His long legs would soon bring him up to the puny, little rabbit. But after half a mile of dashing along a road that the rains had turned into very poor track, big Seth's smile vanished. The little beggar certainly could run. Bushville was still

nearly two miles away and Seth settled down for a long chase, confident that his superior powers would win in a two-mile stretch, and knowing that the strange boy would be obliged to keep to the highway.

It was an accident that gave Seth a quick victory. Scotty discovered that he found better going by running on the sod at the side of the road. He ran too near the ditch, slipped, and fell, rolling over and over down a slight embankment. Before he could get to his feet Seth was upon him.

"Some runner you are!" Seth gasped, helping the boy to his feet but being careful to keep good hold. "You certainly are a runner, Scotty. Now let's get back to the house and get these wet clothes off you."

"Don't hit me!" pleaded Scotty. "I didn't take anything. Don't hit me!"

"Who said anything about hitting you?" asked Seth. "There'll be no hitting while you're with me. Come along and let's get to bed. We have to get up early in the morning."

"I'll tell you the truth," persisted Scotty. "Honest to goodness truth; I didn't take a thing. I just got thinking of having to go where that doctor is, and I give out. I'm feared to go back down

there. I'm feared of the doctor. That's why I lit out. Honest!"

"No doctor or any one else can do you any harm while you are with me," said Seth, positively.

"I'm afraid! You don't know that doctor. I'm afraid!"

"You forget about that doctor," insisted Seth. "I'm going to take you into the kitchen and warm you up. Then we are going to get a good night's sleep, and in the morning you'll feel better."

"You are mighty good," said Scotty. "So is Mr. Eastcome. If I can stay with one of you I won't be so scared. But I'm feared o' that doctor."

"What are you afraid of?" asked Seth.

"Oh, he'll beat me. He's done it lots of times. He wants to get all my money."

Seth controlled his inclination to laugh and hastened to comfort the boy.

"He shan't get it," he assured him. "The doctor shall not beat you and he shall not get your money. I promise you that. To-night you shall sleep right in my bed and to-morrow you will travel with Mr. Eastcome in the back of his car."

"I'd give anything to be big and strong like you," said the little chap. "I don't know but what I'd kill that doctor."

"Hush. You mustn't talk that way," ordered Seth. "You must not even think of killing people."

"But he'll kill *me,*" complained Scotty. "If he knew I'd told you about him, he would keep after me until he killed me. You promise me you won't tell anybody what I've told you; not a single soul; not even Mr. Eastcome."

"I'll promise," agreed Seth. "You can tell me anything you like. I'll be so mum you'll think you have locked up your secrets in a safe deposit vault."

"How did you know I had a safe deposit vault?" exclaimed Scotty in terror again. "I didn't tell you. I never said a word about it."

"Oh, I just guessed that," said Seth, to quiet the boy. "I'm an awfully good guesser. Don't worry about that."

"That's one of the things he's after me for," continued Scotty. "He wants to get the combination of my safe and I'm the only one can give it to him. But I won't! I never will!"

"Of course you won't," Seth hoped to calm the boy by agreeing with his ravings. "Of course you won't. Let's get to bed."

"You are sure the doctor won't get me."

"I am sure that no doctor or any one else will get you. Shut your eyes, and go to sleep."

"And you'll stay by me, and you'll help me to grow big and strong?"

Seth nodded assent. The little chap, quite exhausted, did fall asleep in a few minutes. Seth looked at him with pity. "Poor little loony," he said to himself. "It's going to be a hard job to get him straightened up. But I'll encourage his idea of growing big and strong, and try to get him to forget about this doctor who wants all his money and wants the combination to his safe! Poor little loony!"

Seth slept soundly but he was up before daybreak. A strong wind had come up, about midnight, and had done much towards drying the mud. When Mr. Eastcome came out, a little later, Seth was able to assure him that the roads would be passable.

"I'm jolly glad to hear it," said Mr. Eastcome. "I must push right along. I promised Doctor Pingree that I would stop and look in on his people at Bushville. But I shan't stop long."

"Did this boy Scotty ever have anything to do with Doctor Pingree, sir?" asked Seth.

"Quite impossible, I should say," replied Mr. Eastcome.

"I supposed not," said Seth. "He's afraid of

some doctor, but I promised not to tell, so we will just let it go."

"Just as well. Just as well. 'Pon my word, that lad's a puzzle. I've rather a fancy for helping the poor waif, but he may be too much for me. Two days I've had him, and he seems afraid of me still."

Seth decided to say nothing about the chase of the night before.

"I don't think he's afraid of you, Mr. Eastcome. When we get him to Wildheath Ranch we'll see if we can't make something of him," he said.

"Yes, indeed. He shall have a trial," agreed Mr. Eastcome. "And you think you can bring two good stout boys like yourself with you."

"Yes, sir. One of them is Pingree Lewis. You will see him if you stop at the Lewis place in Bushville. I shall need one full day to get my truck in first-class shape, but I think we shall all be ready to start early to-morrow."

"That will be splendid," said Mr. Eastcome. "I will push along to-day and take the boy Scotty with me. I can travel a little faster than you, but I shall expect to see you at Wildheath Ranch within a few days after I get there."

"Yes, sir," said Seth. "You may depend upon us."

CHAPTER III

ENGAGING PING AND PANSY

In ordinary seasons Seth Payson would have found a great obstacle in the way of securing the help of his two friends. Both of them were in Bushville Rural High School, as also was Seth himself. But this spring a sad event which caused the death of the principal of the High School and the removal of one of the teachers brought about a great shortening of the term. School had closed and the boys were free.

"I know what you've come for, Seth," shouted Pingree Lewis, as Seth approached. "He's been here—Mr. Eastcome, you know. He talked to mother."

"Will you go?" called Seth.

"Will I go?" exclaimed Ping Pong. "Will a Waterbury go? Will a Henry go? Will a cyclone go? You watch me. See my wheels go round. When do we start? Where do we go from here?"

"Don't get excited about it," counselled Seth.

"You may be tired enough of it before we get through. We aren't going down to Wildheath Ranch just to have fun. We're going there to run a fruit ranch."

"Why won't that be fun?" asked Ping. "I expect to have a great time with my uncle, Doctor Pingree; just the time of my life."

"Hope you will," said Seth. "But I won't even hire you unless you say work."

"Oh, I'll work, all right. You know I always work. What are you going to do about taking Pansy?"

"You can't get along without Pansy, can you?"

"Yes; I can if I have to. But why can't he go too? He's a big fellow, and you know Pansy Flowers can do a whole lot of work, even if he is fat."

"Well, be easy. I'm going to hire Pansy if his folks will let him go. I was told to get two of you."

"Fine!" exclaimed Ping Pong. "I'm awfully glad you can take Pansy. Let's go right over and see his folks. It's too bad you can't take Shadow, too. He'll be awfully flat when he knows. We'd better get away without letting him see us."

Walter Flowers, who had won the nickname of

"Pansy" because there was so little about him that could be considered modest or tiny, was always ready and anxious to do whatever found favor with his chum, Pingree Lewis. As soon as the boys spread the plan before him, it fired his imagination.

"It's great!" said Pansy. "I wouldn't care to ask for anything better. How do we pack our eats?"

"There you go!" exclaimed Seth. "Your first thought is eating. I'm not going to take you along unless you agree to work."

"I'll work all right. You know that I'll work, Seth. But I didn't suppose there was any harm in asking a natural question."

"It wouldn't be natural if you didn't ask that question," agreed Seth. "There will be plenty of good stuff to eat. But *work* is the important thing. We are going down in my truck. It will take two or three days travel. You hurry up and find if you can go."

Pansy came out again in a few minutes, bringing his mother. She was a little mite of a woman. People who learned that she was Pansy's mother always jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Flowers must have the stature of an elephant.

"I don't like to have Walter go," she said to Seth. "He'd be sure to take cold. And I don't know that he would get enough to eat. Are you sure that your mother is willing for you to go, Seth?"

"Yes, Mrs. Flowers. Mother knows that I must face the world and she thinks this is a good way. You see, this Mr. Eastcome is a fine man; and there is Doctor Pingree, too: he is Ping's uncle."

"I'd be afraid something would happen to Walter. I wouldn't have a quiet minute," Mrs. Flowers insisted.

"The only happening would be that he'd get strong instead of fat," said Seth. "You remember the month he spent with me at Scout Camp last year. He changed a lot of soft fat into good muscle that time, didn't he?"

"But he was half famished when he got home," said Mrs. Flowers. "I remember his very first words were 'Mother, I could eat twenty pancakes, one on top of the other.'"

"But they wouldn't be good for me, mother. You know they wouldn't be good for me," cried Pansy, suddenly stricken by a wave of reform. "Please let me go, mother. I'll get enough to eat. You can trust me for that."

"Good board is part of his pay," added Seth.

"What other pay does he get?" asked Mrs. Flowers suddenly.

Seth looked very blank.

"Tell you the truth, I don't know," he said. "I never thought to ask Mr. Eastcome what the pay for the boys would be. He is very generous. He is giving me fine pay, but, of course, it is more for the use of my truck than anything else. I'll bet he won't give less than a dollar and a half a day, and board."

"Oh, never mind about pay, mother," pleaded Pansy. "Don't you see what a splendid opportunity this is. To go off on an adventure with Seth and Ping. Maybe we'll meet bears and lions—"

"That will do, Walter Flowers. You can't go," decided Mrs. Flowers, with a snap of the jaw that was fairly audible. She turned without another word and walked into the house.

"Now you have done it, Pansy!" exclaimed Seth. "Why can't you keep that romantic imagination in order. You know we shan't see any lions or bears. I suppose I'll have to let Shadow come instead of you. He isn't big like you, but he's wiry and active."

"Wait, Seth. Please don't drop me yet. Give me a chance to go and see dad. He wants me to be

toughened up. He'll be glad to have me go. You'll be able to keep the pay for yourself, Seth. Maybe he'll pay a bonus."

"You must think him awfully anxious to get rid of you," said Seth.

"It isn't that, Seth," interposed Ping. "Mr. Flowers is a real man and he doesn't want old Pansy to be babied. You wait, Seth. Hold off until we've had a talk with Mr. Flowers."

Hours passed before Seth again saw the two boys. Meanwhile he had put his car into the local repair shop, and, with the aid of one of the mechanics, had given it a rapid overhauling. It was long past dinner-time, but he had not found time to eat.

"It's all right!" shouted Pansy, as the two boys rushed into the garage. "I can go!"

"How did you fix it?" asked Seth.

"Fortune was with us," explained Ping. "Mr. Flowers wasn't in his office. The stenographer said he had gone out to show a farm to a buyer from the north—he thought it was the Walker farm. We walked all the way out to Walkers, thinking he would give us a ride back, and then we found he hadn't been there at all. When we got back to Pansy's house Mr. Flowers was at home, and he was raising Ned because some one had used the

only good safety razor blade he had left. Pansy owned up that he had borrowed it, but he knew where it was and all the shaving he had done with it hadn't spoiled the edge to amount to anything. So he got it and Mr. Flowers says, 'When a boy gets big enough to fool with his father's razor he ought to be big enough to take care of himself. I'm just going to send you off on that trip with Seth Payson, that your mother's been telling me about. That'll teach you something, young man.' He winked at me as he said it, and we both ran out and came to find you before anything could spoil it."

"That's settled, then," said Seth. "We'll be starting early to-morrow morning; let's say seven o'clock. Sorry Shadow won't be going. I'm afraid he knows about it, because he was out to our house this morning. But Mr. Eastcome only asked for two, so I can't ask Shadow to go."

"We're sorry, too. But we're both of us glad both of us are going so that both of us can have all the fun and adventure that both of us want," said Ping.

"I hope both of you won't be disappointed," said Seth. "I'm prophesying lots of fun, lots of adventure, but also lots of work."

"Lead us to it," said Ping and Pansy in a single breath.

It was not a light matter for Seth to leave his father and mother the next morning, to go off into an unknown country, to be gone for months. He tried to be very brave.

"You'll be busy, father. And so will you, mother. And so shall I, too," he said. "It will be our busiest time of year. So we shan't have much time to spend wishing for each other, and the first thing we know the time will have passed and I shall be back again at the old place, bigger and better, if not richer."

"You will be richer in experience, Seth, and the fact that you have already given your pay to help your father out of his troubles won't make you any the poorer," said Mrs. Payson.

"It will not," agreed Seth.

"We are glad to let you go, Seth, with our full confidence," said Mr. Payson. "We know that you will remember the things we have tried to teach you all these years, and we believe that a boy who honors his father and mother as you do will not forget the God they have taught him to love. Don't forget to write, boy; and if you should meet any trouble, remember father and mother are always back of you."

Seth was not ashamed of the tears that dimmed his eyes as he started his truck away from the dear old home. They had disappeared long before he reached town. At the home of Pingree Lewis he found the whole Lewis family waiting to receive him. Pingree had a clothing roll the size of which indicated preparation for all emergencies.

"Why, Ping!" exclaimed Seth. "What you doing with all that dunnage? You taking a dress suit?"

"Don't you bother about that clothing roll, Seth," said Mrs. Lewis. "I fixed that up myself. There's plenty of room for it in the back of the truck and I don't think it has a thing that Pingree won't need."

"Just as you say, Mrs. Lewis," agreed Seth. "Ping's about my size and some of the stuff may come in handy. Anyway, this is a three-ton truck. Hope you've fed him breakfast and said your goodbys."

"We have," said Mrs. Lewis bravely. "Pingree will give me and his sisters a kiss and step into that truck in less than one minute."

She was true to her word, for Mrs. Lewis was a brave woman of the most approved type of modern mother, "the kind of mother a fellow likes to have," Pingree often said.

"I'll bet we're due for a terrible time getting Pansy away," said Seth. "I almost wish I had asked Shadow instead. His folks would have been sensible; and Shadow's an awfully good fellow, too."

"So is Pansy," affirmed Ping. "We'll just have to stand the weeps for a little while, and start the truck on its way again as soon as we can. One thing, Mrs. Flowers is sure to have some good eats cooked up; enough to last us for a couple of days, I wouldn't wonder."

But they were spared any of the anticipated distress. They did not even turn into the street that held the Flowers' home, for Pansy and his father, loaded with bundles, were waiting at the corner.

"We didn't want the noise of the truck to wake mother," said Mr. Flowers in explanation. "She had rather a bad time last night, so we're letting her sleep. She sat up long after midnight doing this extra cooking."

"Well, that's awfully fine of her, Mr. Flowers," said Seth cordially. "You tell her we surely appreciate her letting Walter go, and we'll take fine care of him. And he'll take care of us, too; won't you, Pansy?"

"He'll do his bit or I'll be mightily disappointed," said Mr. Flowers.

"I won't disappoint you, dad," Pansy promised. "Good-by!"

The truck gathered speed as Seth changed gears, and the three boys were fairly started on the way to their adventures in the Ozarks.

"Just one thing I hate," exclaimed Seth. "I can't feel a bit good about leaving old Shadow behind. But Mr. Eastcome only asked for two and Shadow is a mere runt compared to you fellows."

"Shadow" was Seth's cousin. His real name was Ernest Lawless, but, in Bushville, he was almost always known by the nickname of Shadow. And this name grew out of his devotion to his cousin Seth.

"Let's telegraph Mr. Eastcome for permission to bring one more," suggested Ping.

"No. I can't do that," said Seth. "I'll just have to make the best of it. But it's a big surprise to me that old Shadow takes it so quietly. He knows we are going, because mother explained to him yesterday just why I couldn't ask him to go."

Seth's big surprise changed to one still bigger a few minutes later. Just as the truck reached the

edge of town, near Shadow's home, there he stood, a bundle of clothes in his hand, waiting for them.

"Mother said I could go," he explained to Seth.

"But I don't know that Mr. Eastcome wants you," objected Seth.

"Who cares?" said Shadow. "I have some money. All I want is to go along."

"But there's only one seat in the truck, and we three crowd it so that it squeaks."

"Three are too many for that seat," said Shadow. "Let's put some hay in the back of the truck and Pansy and I will sit on that."

"But suppose Mr. Eastcome won't let you stay?"

"I have money to bring me back by train," said Shadow briefly. If he had any doubts as to how far two dollars and sixty cents would carry him by train, he pushed them aside.

Shadow was not likely to be a drag on the expedition. He was almost as clever with a machine as Seth, and he could drive the truck so well that he could safely act as substitute driver.

"Jump in," said Seth. "I'm already tired of having old Pansy try to squeeze his shrinking frame into this seat. And if I left you behind, I don't suppose I'd have a peaceful minute. Jump in, and I'll try to make it right with Mr. Eastcome."

And now they really were under way; a set of country boys to judge by mere looks; but at heart as goodly a quartette of knights as ever set forth in days of old to joust for fame and fortune.

CHAPTER IV

THE DWARF OF THE HILLS

Two days of travel, and the boys were drawing near their journey's end. Shadow was driving while Seth dozed in the hay in the back of the truck.

Suddenly Seth sat up and looked around. The appearance of the country had changed in the hour that Shadow had been driving. It was bare and desolate now. The signs that had marked the telephone poles at every section crossing had disappeared. Houses were few and the distances between them great.

"Where are we?" demanded Seth.

"On the way, I reckon," replied Shadow cheerfully.

"Which way did you turn after you passed Schoolhouse 19?"

"Didn't turn. Kept right on south."

"I told you to turn west. Now we can either go back or keep on till the next section line, and then turn west, hoping to intercept the main road farther on."

"Oh, keep straight ahead!" cried Ping Pong. "Don't turn back."

So Seth took the wheel again and drove ahead. But they covered mile after mile of dreary country without finding the looked-for turning to the west. Seth thought they must have gone at least six miles, the country growing more rugged and wooded as they advanced. At last they reached a little clearing in which were two houses and a store.

A woman came slowly out of the store, and after a long time a man also appeared.

"They don't seem very anxious to meet us," said Shadow. "You'd think they'd be glad to see any one up here in this desolate place."

"You don't understand," Ping Pong reminded him. "A lot of these people in the mountains are moonshiners. We are wearing Boy Scout uniforms, and they may think we are revenue officers."

"We've missed our road," explained Seth, as they entered the little store. "We are trying to find Wildheath Fruit Ranch, near the big place they call the Palace."

"I'll go over and ask some o' the men," said the woman rather ungraciously. "Charlie, will ye watch the store fer me?" she asked, turning to a boy about Seth's age, but dwarfed by a spinal deformity. The

boys had seen him as soon as they entered the place, but had carefully refrained from staring at him.

"You are Boy Scouts, aren't you?" said Charlie. "I've read a lot about your uniform and your badges. I wish I could be a Boy Scout, but I don't suppose you ever admit fellows like me." The boys noticed the good English the boy used.

"That's where you're wrong," said Seth. "We couldn't keep a fellow like you out if we would, and we wouldn't if we could. You have lived right in the woods all your life. You'd probably be keener on woodcraft than any of us."

"I'm awfully strong," boasted the dwarf. "I don't have weak spells any more, and I can do lots of things. I can even swim, though I can't dive. I'm not so bad at walking, either. I came up here this forenoon on an errand—nearly fifteen miles of brush and timber and swamp—and I did it all in half a day."

"You'd do all right," Seth assured him. "You give me your name and address and I'll manage to get the papers for you so you can join as a Pioneer Scout. Write your name and address"—

He was interrupted by a harsh voice from the rear of the store.

"Drap it! Drap it! We don't want none o' yore tricks. You-all don't git no names ner no info'mation out'n we-all."

Seth looked up and saw that three rough-looking men had just entered the store by a back door.

"I'm just taking Charlie's name and address so I can send him some information about Boy Scouts," he explained pleasantly.

"Put away yore book! We don't want no info'mation ner we don't give no info'mation. We-all ain't that kind. Better git out o' here while the gittin's good."

Seth looked at the deformed boy for guidance.

"Can't you explain to them?" he asked.

"Not now," said the dwarf quietly, "not while you are here. You must not blame them too much. It's the uniform; they don't understand it."

"Do any of you know Wildheath Fruit Ranch?" asked Seth.

"Aye, we do, an' pow'ful little good we knows of it!"

"Tell us the best road and we'll go."

"The best road is to turn round in yore tracks an' git clear back to whar ye come from. Then git directions f'm them as don't know nothing harmful 'bout the place. The shortes' way is to go west

on this trail ahead of ye, git acrost the river the best way ye kin, an' keep on goin'."

The other men laughed as their leader gave these remarkably concise directions. Seth, looking again in Charlie's direction, saw in his eyes that which told him not to tarry.

"Come on, fellows," he said. "These people don't understand yet that Boy Scouts are friends to all. I'm sure that some day you men will learn about what Boy Scouts stand for, and then you'll be sorry you drove us away, but it's getting too late to stop for explanations this evening, so we'll be going."

Seated once more in their truck, they had yet to decide which way to go.

"Who votes now to turn back the way we came?" Seth asked.

There was not a single response.

"Who votes to try the road to the west?"

"Every last one of us," said Shadow. "We all want to go ahead, not back."

"So I supposed," said Seth. "Scouts can take a back trail if it seems good sense, but they'd rather go ahead, even if the way is a little hard and mysterious. We'll make the most of the little daylight that is left, but I reckon we'll have to camp out an-

other night, so keep your eyes open for a likely spot."

They had gone scarcely a hundred yards before the woods hid them from view of the settlement. Seth ran but a short distance farther before he stopped his engine.

"Not going to camp here, are we?" asked Ping Pong. "We have an hour of daylight yet and this is mighty close to the unfriendly natives."

"We'll see," said Seth. "I think we'll have some company if we wait awhile. Just as we left, Charlie made a sign that I think meant 'wait for me.' "

"Let's get something to eat then, if we're going to wait," suggested Pansy, whose large frame seemed to need frequent refreshment. "We have plenty of stuff that doesn't need cooking."

"All right, Pansy Pantry. How that idea ever happened to occur to you is a mystery. We'll do it, though. We'll take a sandwich lunch while we wait."

They were finishing their lunch when the little dwarf suddenly appeared in front of their truck, as if from the road itself.

He laughed at their surprise.

"I have read how you Boy Scouts practice tracking," he said. "I thought I'd show you that I can

do a little of that, too. Say, I'm going with you, if you can make room for me."

"Sure we can. You're just the person we need most," replied Seth. "Did you have any trouble getting away?"

"No. They never supposed I'd overtake you. When you left I tried to explain about Boy Scouts, but you can't make these people understand all at once. And you mustn't blame them. They aren't moonshiners, but they have neighbors who are, and almost every one in the hills connects uniformed strangers with revenue officers, and thinks of them as natural enemies."

"Well, how do we get to Wildheath Fruit Ranch?"

"I know the road. I live pretty close to it. If you had followed this west road as they told you to do, it would have brought you to the river where there is neither bridge nor ferry, and you would have had to turn north and go back nearly the way you came. I knew this while they were directing you, but I couldn't say anything then."

"But we shall have to cross that river somewhere."

"Yes, but you can get across on a ferry about a mile from here. I don't reckon it ever did carry an

automobile over. Folks in these hills don't use them. But it carries teams and wagons right often."

"How about camping here and crossing the river in the morning?"

"No, you'd better go to-night. The ferryman won't know much about you if you go now, but he will by morning. You don't reckon you could camp out in these woods all night without their knowing it?"

"Would they make trouble?"

"They surely would. Another thing, don't tell any other folks you are going to Wildheath Fruit Ranch or Wildheath Palace. You won't make any friends by it."

"Very well, we'll be quiet about it. Before we get through with this country we aim to show them that anything that Boy Scouts work with is on the absolute level, but I guess we can't do it in a day. When shall we start from here?"

"Right now. The quicker the better, especially while the daylight still holds out."

"Will you go with us or ahead?"

"I'll ride for apiece. Then I'll go ahead and be waiting at the ferry when you come. You never would have found this road without me."

The devious turns and windings of the wagon

track made it very clear that the dwarf's words were correct. Seth often boasted that he could take his truck wherever a wagon could go. Now he was put to the test.

"It's straight downhill, now," said Charlie, at last. "You can't miss it. Give me a good start and then come down without letting your engine make much racket."

"I won't use my engine at all," said Seth. "I can coast down that grade. I'll have to be in gear part of the way to keep from coming too fast. You watch me. I'll creep up without much more noise than a butterfly."

They were within sight of the ferry and the little cabins that stood at the bank of the river before any one saw them. They could see Charlie arguing with the ferryman. Then Seth was obliged to start his engine to get clear of some mud, and at once all the inhabitants rushed out.

"Oh, looky, looky! It's an automobeel made like a big waggin'. I ain't never seed one like that afore," exclaimed a woman.

"What d'ye want?" asked the ferryman. "What's that thing you got there?"

"It's just a truck," said Seth. "We heard you ran a ferry here and we want to cross the river."

"This ferry ain't never carried any animile o' that kind," objected the ferryman.

"You've carried loaded wagons, haven't you?" asked Seth.

"Yes, lots of 'em. Wunst I carried a load of twenty-six hawgs."

"This will be easy for you, then," said Seth. "Let me run the car on the ferry and you see how easy it goes."

The little ferryboat was drawn up alongside a small dock. Without giving the man time to debate the subject, Seth skilfully ran his car on to the boat.

"It'll be a dollar," said the man. "I ain't goin' to ferry no automobeel over for less'n a dollar."

"Here it is," said Seth, "and that boy there can come right over in the same load. He can sit in the truck and then he won't take up any more room."

The man made no objection, for even his slow-working mind comprehended that he was charging four times his usual price for the trip. He poled his rude craft skilfully into deep water, and in five minutes they were at the opposite shore.

"They ain't no dock this side o' the river," said the man. "But it ain't a foot deep here, an' it's good sandy bottom."

"We don't mind a little water," replied Seth.

"We might have had trouble getting on, but it's easy enough to get off."

The man watched them drive away up the steep mountain road in open-mouthed wonder. Then the trail hid them from view.

"I suppose it's safe enough for us to camp now," suggested Seth.

"I wouldn't," said Charlie. "Now that the river is crossed you are only eleven miles from Wildheath. The road does some climbing up and down, but it follows the river all the way, and a lot of it is easy going. The nearer you get to Wildheath the wiser it is for you not to try camping out. I know the people here."

"Is it as bad as that? What makes the people have such a grudge against Wildheath?"

"It's from years and years ago. For over thirty years the man at the Palace treated our people badly. He brought servants from England and he set traps and spring guns, and put up notices that trespassers would be prosecuted. Maybe the people who own the place now feel different, but we haven't any way of being sure of it. Folks around here just naturally don't have any use for Wildheath, and so the best thing you can do is to get under cover."

"But we aren't harming any one."

"No, you are all right. I like you. You didn't stare at me or call names as so many people do. But our folks haven't had the time to read that I've had. Some day I'm going to be educated enough to teach them a lot of things, and there are teachers and missionaries working now all through the hills. But the people haven't learned yet."

"Well, we are rather anxious to keep on anyway, if it is only eleven miles," said Seth. "We'll carry you just as far as you go."

When the dwarf left them they were not far from their journey's end. He gave them plain directions. It was not very late at night when they arrived before massive gates over which they could dimly see the letters, "WILDHEATH LODGE."

"Behold the Palace!" declared Ping. "I'll see if I can open up."

Jumping out of the truck he ran to perform his errand. He was still standing in perplexity before the imposing entrance when the report of a rifle sounded and a bullet rang as it struck the iron gate.

CHAPTER V

SCOTTY TELLS A STRANGE TALE

Scout training had made Seth quick-witted. Instantly he switched off his lights, backed his car into the shadow of the trees, and shut off the engine.

"Lie flat down in the truck, fellows," he ordered. "It is deep enough to protect you. Ping will be all right. He is hiding in the shadow of the gates."

No more shots came. Sounds of rushing feet were heard from inside the inclosure, and in a few minutes the gates were flung open. At first no one came, but after a little delay, two men cautiously stepped forward. One of them was Mr. Eastcome and the other Doctor Edward Pingree.

"We are over here in the shadow," called Seth in a low voice. "Shall I drive in?"

"If driving in will satisfy you, do it by all means," replied Mr. Eastcome. "But don't fire any more salutes."

Seth cautiously climbed to the driver's seat and with head bent low he started the car and drove in

through the entrance, his heart racing away in fear that he was inviting another shot from the unseen foe.

"We didn't fire that gun," he explained, when they were safely inside and the gates closed. "Ping Lewis had just jumped down to see if he could open the gates, when the shot came from behind, just as if some one were trying a snap at him from the woods."

"It wasn't intended for Pingree," said the Doctor. "Three times now that has happened, and always when a new patient has come to live at the Palace. Some one is trying to scare them."

A few yards from the gate stood a building in which the Doctor and Mr. Eastcome had been busy.

"Is this the Palace?" asked Ping.

The men laughed.

"Wait until you see the Palace, and you will know why we laughed," said the Doctor. "It is a good long drive before we get there. It just happened that Mr. Eastcome and I were down here overhauling some supplies."

"I thought we were to go to the ranch," said Seth.

"That is outside the inclosure," Doctor Pingree explained. "You are now in the private grounds of Wildheath Lodge, but as every one calls it the

Palace, we may as well use that name. These grounds form an inclosed park. It is nearly a mile to the Palace. If you want to go to the Wildheath Fruit Ranch you go out of the grounds again and follow a road almost parallel with this until you reach the new buildings of the ranch. You can walk over to the Palace from the ranch in a few minutes. But if you drive around by the road, it is nearly two miles."

"Well, I guess we belong at the ranch, so we'd better get on the right road."

"You are welcome to stay at the Palace to-night," said the Doctor. "We have plenty of room."

"There is just one objection," said Mr. Eastcome —"I left a boy over at the ranch. The gardeners are there, so he is not entirely alone, yet I dislike to leave him."

"You mean the boy who calls himself Scotty?" asked Seth.

"The very lad," replied Mr. Eastcome. "Not exactly a strong-minded youth."

"No, I didn't think he was. If there is any shooting around the ranch, he'll be frightened out of his wits. Tell me how to get to the ranch buildings and I'll go and stay with him."

"You and I will go," said Mr. Eastman to Seth.

"The other chaps may go with the Doctor for to-night. They can come over to the ranch in the morning."

So Seth drove his truck out through the gates, and, with Mr. Eastcome sitting beside him to give directions, started to the ranch house. It was not an easy drive on a dark night. Down a steep descent into a dark valley they went, the road cutting through woods so dense that where the glow of their headlights shone, it came back as if from a solid wall of timber; no ray of light seeming to penetrate the dark recesses.

The descent ended, they began a steep, upward climb. Soon they were passing fields of young, cultivated trees, then open fields that Seth guessed were given over to berries and small fruits. At last the lights of the ranch came into view, and at the same time there loomed up, a little way ahead of them, the stately bulk of an imposing mansion, glowing from top to bottom with electric lights. Seth identified it at once.

"That must be the Palace," he said. "I never saw one, but I can easily understand how the natives came to give it that name."

"Yes, that's the Palace," said Mr. Eastcome. "It has nearly a hundred rooms, and is supplied by its

own electric-light plant, waterworks, and sewer system. It is in good condition now, under Doctor Pingree's care, and is a very valuable property. We get our lighting for the ranch house from over there."

The ranch house was also well lighted. It was a comfortable building, unpretentious but inviting. Along each side were two long, low buildings that were not lighted.

"Those are the bunk houses," said Mr. Eastcome. "The gardener and his helpers have the one on the north. I shall give you boys the one on the south. You go in and find that boy Scotty; I am going to step over to the Palace about a matter I had forgotten."

Seth searched the brilliantly lighted house from ground floor to attic and back again to the basement before he finally found Scotty. The boy was hiding away in a small closet. When he saw that his discoverer was Seth, he staggered out of the closet and dropped down on a box in great relief.

"Has he gone? Am I safe?" he whispered.

He wore nothing but a coarse nightshirt. His hair was towsled, and his face was grimed with dirt from the closet in which he had been hiding. He was a wild-looking figure.

"What's wrong, old boy?" asked Seth. "Been having a nightmare?"

"Am I safe?" he cried again. "Has he gone?"

"Sure you're safe," said Seth. "I don't know what 'he' you mean, but there's no one here but me."

"He came to the window and looked in," said Scotty. "I don't believe he saw me, but I saw him. He's going to kill me if he gets hold of me. You see, Mr. Eastcome said I'd better go to bed in the house to-night, since I was alone. I didn't go to sleep. I just knew that man would be here. And then I saw him, and as soon as he turned away I ran down here. Are you sure he's gone?"

"Yes, he's gone all right. Cheer up, Scotty! I'm going to bed and you can come and sleep with me in the bunk house. There's nothing to be afraid about."

"There is, too. You don't think I saw anybody. You think I'm crazy. You just let me tell you about it."

"Go ahead," Seth said encouragingly.

"Promise me you won't tell Mr. Eastcome or anybody? If I tell, he'll kill me."

"He won't kill you," said Seth. "But I'll promise. Go ahead and get it off your chest. Then maybe you'll get some sleep."

"Well, I'll have to go way back to tell it all. My father is dead and my mother is dead. I don't seem to remember ever having anybody to make over me very much. I guess the folks who took care of me were good enough. But I wasn't any kin to them, and they had a family of their own, so why would they be doing much for me? It isn't as if I had any looks. Look at me once and you know what the fellows called me. If it wasn't 'Chinless Billy' it was 'Chinny Bill.' Sometimes they'd ask me if I knew I'd left part of my face on the dresser. Whenever a kid didn't know what to do with himself, he'd start out to chase me. Boys not much more than half my size would do it. You see, I was just marked that way. I heard an old woman say once I was marked when I was born, so then I knew it wouldn't do any good for me to try to do anything."

"You poor kid!" exclaimed Seth. "The mean part of it is that there's nothing to it. You were just as good as any of them, if only you had known it."

"Well, about a year or so ago, some one died and it seems there was a lot of money that ought to have come to my father. He was dead, so of course it belonged to me. A man that was some kin to my

father came looking for him and found me. He said I'd been neglected something fierce, that I needed education for my mind, body, and nerves at the same time. So what did he do but send me to this very place, the Palace, to be set straight.

"Well, I was put in charge of the Doctor, and he treated me square enough until this guardian of mine died. Then he got himself made guardian. The first thing I knew he wanted all my money, and when I wouldn't sign for what he wanted, he'd threaten to kill me.

"He had some workmen come all the way from St. Louis and they built him a big safety vault in that Palace. When it was done he told the boss workman it was my vault, and for him to give me the slip of paper that had the combination on it. He gathered up all the things I set any real store by and put them into the vault, and also a lot of valuable securities and a lot of money that really belonged to me, and he made a great show of me having the combination to all that.

"Of course he figured I'd give him the paper as soon as the workmen were gone, but for once he figured wrong. They went by train. Just at the very same time I took a chance and got down the river to Little Rock in a boat. The money and

things were no good to me so long as he was guardian, and I figured I'd be happier if I left it all.

"Well, when I went away I got an old suit of overalls, and for fear he'd find me, I never went where respectable people go. I just stayed with tramps and colored folks and the kind of people who don't read. All the time I wanted to come back here long enough to open that vault and get out some things. Then one day I saw Mr. Eastcome. I knew him but he didn't know anything about me. I found he was coming here and I managed to get up nerve to beg a ride. I'd been away from the Doctor so long I thought I wasn't afraid of him any more. But I am! If he finds me he'll kill me."

"Well, well, you get into this bunk and go to sleep," said Seth. "I'll look after you."

"And you won't tell any one?"

"Not a thing. I promise, Scout honor!"

"And say, will you help me to get over being so scared-like and be like you and the other boys."

"I surely will," promised Seth. "You stay with us at this ranch. Keep out of the way as much as you like, and let me help you start to be a man."

Seth took the bunk next to the frightened boy's and was glad to find that he soon dropped to sleep.

"Poor little loony!" he said pityingly. "It must be an awful life. Some bogey who looks in at windows, and wants all his money, and wants the combination to his safe! No wonder he is skinny and scared. When I've had him for awhile he's going to get flesh on his bones, and forget all these wild ideas about wicked doctors, and vast fortunes, and secret strong boxes."

But it is violating no confidence to say that, later on, Seth revised his conclusions.

CHAPTER VI

THE PALACE AND THE KNIGHT

Seth was up with the early birds to greet his first morning at Wildheath Ranch. Scotty still lay quietly asleep, and Seth moved very cautiously, so as to avoid disturbing him.

"He sleeps pretty well when he feels safe under my wing," thought Seth. "That's the way we will bring him back to sanity."

Scarcely had Seth stepped outside the door before the glories of Wildheath Lodge—the Palace—burst upon him. Modeled after the style of a very ancient and striking old English castle, it was indeed a remarkable structure. Seth, whose experience of life had not gone far beyond Bushville, had never seen such a place. To him it was neither lodge, house, château or even palace. It was a fairy structure. Its terraces, turrets and spires took him back to the days of chivalry and knighthood. He was a young squire, standing before the castle of his dreams, ready to fare forth in any honorable quest.

As he gazed upon the beautiful building, the rising sun, coming up from the eastern horizon, threw its first bright rays upon the polished windows of the upper stories and turned them into mirrors of gold. The fairy building glowed in splendid effulgence. It was no longer a palace; it was an enchanted city. And Seth was no longer a country boy; but a noble knight whom Merlin, the magician, had transported to these scenes, with his train of valiant knights and squires, to defend its portals against invading hosts.

Would they protect Wildheath Lodge? Would they help to maintain "the Palace"? Would they bring prosperity to Wildheath Ranch? If Mr. Eastcome placed any dependence for these things upon Seth Payson and his mates, he should not be disappointed.

Seth found that a graveled path led from the ranch house in the direction of the Palace. There was no driveway, and it was evident that a purpose existed in keeping the Palace enclosed from trespass, for the pathway led only to a small gate in a rather massive wall. This wall ran as far as Seth's vision could follow and seemed to indicate that it enclosed the whole of the spacious grounds of the Palace, thus separating them very effectively from the ranch.

No doubt there were parallel driveways to Ranch and Palace, but one was within the enclosing walls and the other outside. The only means of communication apparent was this small gate in the wall. And the gate was locked!

It was rather a formidable wall for purposes of scaling. It might well be considered an impassable barrier by the invalid men and frail ladies who were the present occupants of the Palace. But to the full, noble knight who had been commissioned by Merlin to bring relief to that enchanted castle, this massive wall might as well have been a stepping stone. Seth looked carefully at it from several angles, saw a handhold in one place and toehold in two or three others, took a springing start, and was on top of that wall in just about thirteen seconds. Hesitating only a second to choose a nice soft piece of turf for a cushion on which to alight, he disdained to let himself down, but came with a jump instead.

"Ah, ah!" he said aloud, in great good humor with himself, "I marvel that one should consider such an obstacle a barrier to the progress of any staunch, true knight. Forward, my valiant squires. Have at this dragon and snatch the enchanted castle from his venom."

"What's that? What's that?" called a deep voice behind him. "What's all that about enchanted castles?"

Seth turned in great confusion, a strong desire possessing him to fly back the way he had come and bury himself in obscurity. This stuff from King Arthur and His Knights was all right for little kids, but not for a big, strong fellow, almost a man. He saw a large, smiling man in brown overalls, a man almost as big as Pansy's father.

"Beg pardon!" said Seth. "I didn't know there was any one here or I'd have knocked on the gate."

"You're one of the boys who came last night, aren't you?" said the man. "I'm Mr. Jillson, the engineer. I was watching this gate to see if any one tried to go in or out. How d' ye know we have an enchanted castle?"

"I was just spouting," admitted Seth. "I do it sometimes just for fun. I'm Seth Payson and I'm here to try to help Mr. Eastcome make something out of Wildheath Ranch, primarily. I suppose the Palace really isn't any of my business, but Mr. Eastcome told me there had been some trouble, and, if so, I want to help."

"You may get a chance, yet," said Mr. Jillson.

"It surely acted as if there was some magic going on last night. I'm not very strong for knights and squires, but a few active Boy Scouts might do quite a lot for us."

"I'm a Boy Scout," said Seth.

"I thought maybe you were, by the way you came over that wall."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Seth modestly. "It was pretty easy."

"You would have had another guess a few years ago, when the original owner of this building reigned here. I'm a comparatively new man. Came here less than a year ago when Mr. Eastcome made a clean sweep of the old outfit and put in a new doctor, new engineer and everything else. But they tell me that a strong electric current kept intruders from the top of that wall, and I can show you the wires yet."

"The original owner must have been a very peculiar man."

"He was; no doubt about that. I think myself that he was a lunatic, in some respects. He was an Englishman, very wealthy, but couldn't get along with anybody. So he bought this big tract of land and comes out here to set up a kingdom for himself; entirely overlooking the fact that these Ozark moun-

taineers are the most independent persons on earth and refuse to bow down to any one. When he got his place built, there was nothing to do but stay here."

"Must have cost him a lot of money," said Seth.

"Several ordinary fortunes, my boy. It was three years in building. He brought builders here from St. Louis and Little Rock. Most of the material was shipped by freight to Little Rock and then brought here by boat. It was three years in building and two or three more before all the inside finishing was done. It's a gem of a place inside, and a magnificent palace outside, but it's no good to any one for a home. If it had to be sold it wouldn't bring ten per cent. of the cost of construction."

"But Mr. Eastcome is making good use of it, now."

"Pretty good. Mr. Eastcome's an Englishman, too; but he's one of the best kind they make. You might not think it, but he's clever, too. He started this sanitarium scheme about three years ago, and it has been very successful. He had bad luck with the first superintendent, a regular rascal. Mr. Eastcome found out that this Temperby was imposing on some of the patients, so he got the evidence together, and came down on him rather unexpectedly, about

a year ago, and turned him and all his fellow rascals out. Then he brought Doctor Pingree here to be superintendent and I came to be engineer, and we had lots of patients, and everything was going fine until a few months ago, when this enchantment business began."

"You're just joking me, aren't you?" asked Seth.

"No, I'm not. Weren't you at the gate last night when that shot came out of the darkness. Something like that has happened several times lately. Usually it has been just as a new patient has been brought up from the train. Some of them are getting scared, and talking of leaving. Other things have happened, too, that had no business at all to happen in this quiet park. Fierce wild animals have been seen, according to some of the patients. Strange things happened only last night, which is why I was watching that gate. There's plenty of enchantment, all right; and I think Mr. Eastcome would like mighty well to get rid of it."

"If Boy Scouts can help him, we surely will do it," exclaimed Seth.

"I think they can," said Mr. Jillson. "I have a boy of my own about your age. He would like to join up with you boys and be one of your scout troop."

"We want him," replied Seth. "When can I see him?"

"He'll find you, later on," said Mr. Jillson. "I must hurry away to my work, now; but I'm glad you boys have come and I know you are going to help. I'll open this gate in the wall before I go. It is only at night that we keep it locked."

"I must hurry back to the bunk house," said Seth. "I left a boy there who isn't exactly right in his head. He may need me when he wakes up."

Seth found Scotty still asleep. The boy must have been completely worn out. Possibly he had been living in terror for days, and, relaxing at last in his confidence in Seth's protection, was making up for past exhaustion.

He was still asleep when the boys who had stayed over night at the Palace came noisily up, and Seth went out to meet them, and keep them from breaking into the weary one's slumbers.

"How's the Palace?" asked Seth.

"It's great!" replied Ping. "It's simply gorgeous! Uncle Edward has his troubles there, though. He was showing us the swimming pool, a fine, white tiled pool sixty by twenty-five feet, depth running from three feet to seven feet, and we were all admiring it, when—plunk!—every light went out,

and we were all groping in absolute blackness. You can imagine how such a thing would upset the whole works. Suppose you were just taking a dive, and all the lights went out, and you come up in absolute Egypt."

"I didn't know that any such accident had happened," said Seth. "You see, I went to bed early."

"It wasn't an accident," said Ping. "That's the worst of it. Mr. Jillson, the engineer, located the trouble in a short time, and found the apparatus had been tampered with. Fortunately, he had been forehanded enough to have a lot of repair parts on hand."

"Who did it?"

"That's the mystery. Who fired that rifle last night? Was it the same person?"

"Lots of mystery," said Shadow, "and lots of trouble. I'm afraid you haven't brought me to such a peaceful place, after all. Seems to me it's not Boy Scouts that are needed down here, but a special brand of heroes like Knights of the Round Table."

"Boy Scouts are better than Knights of the Round Table for this day and age," declared Seth. "I'm glad we've come here, fellows. I'm glad there's something real for us to do. We can do anything that Knights of the Round Table could do, and our

armor need be nothing more than a khaki uniform, and our swords our good old staves. By the time we have won the friendship of these hill people we shall probably have solved most of the mysteries. Let's organize a new troop to do it, and call ourselves the Round Table Patrol of Ozark Troop I."

"Oh, but you can't do that," objected Pansy. "You have to name your patrol after some animal or bird."

"It isn't a strict rule," said Seth. "Patrols can have any appropriate name."

"Round Table Patrol is the thing," cried Shadow. "I'm in it. Seth can be No. 1 and Ping No. 2. I'm No. 3."

"I'll be No. 4," said Pansy. "And why not take that scared Scotty in and help him?"

"I was just thinking of him," said Seth. "He'll be No. 5. Our friend Charlie will be No. 6. He'll go in if we can find him, and be tickled pink to do it."

"I think Mr. Jillson, the engineer, has a boy old enough to be a scout," said Ping. "He will make seven."

"That's right," agreed Seth. "I met Mr. Jillson this morning and he told me about his boy. Mr. Eastcome says we are to spend the day getting

rested and acquainted, and doing anything we please. I'll go see if poor little Scotty is ready to wake up. Then we'll find our boy, Charlie, and get this patrol organized."

"But how shall we find Charlie?" asked Ping. "We don't know a thing about him, not even his name."

"Yes, we do," said Shadow. "We know where we dropped him last night. And we know he's a cripple. I'll bet there's only one like him in this country. All we need to do is ask some of the natives."

"We'll get into the truck and go back to where we dropped the boy," said Seth. "I'll get Scotty and we'll start just as soon as we've had breakfast."

Mr. Eastcome joined them at the breakfast table, and they asked him if he could tell them anything about Charlie.

"Not much, I'm afraid," he replied. "I'm a bit of a back number in this country. Until this year I have never stayed here long at a time. I know scarcely any one except a few employees. If the boy is a patient I wouldn't be at all likely to know him, for I spend almost all of my time at the ranch and rarely go to the sanitarium. A patient might be there a year or two and I never see him."

"But he isn't a patient," explained Seth, and he went on to explain how they had met the boy and told also of his deformity.

"I think I do know a little of that boy, now that you describe him. His name is Baxter, I believe, and he is a remarkable chap. Has a school and all that, you know. Splendid thing to get him interested in your Scout Troop. Clever move, that would be."

"And you don't know where he lives?"

"Not the least in the world. But drive back to where you left him and ask for Charlie. He's jolly well known, take my word for it. You'll find him."

Back at the fork of the road where Charlie had left them, stood an ancient shack inhabited by a still more ancient negro.

"Sharlee? Sharlee Baxter?" he asked. "He Black Jack's boy. He live over on de island."

"And how do you get to the island?" asked Seth.

"Is you all white boys come f'm the Palace?" asked the negro.

"That's right," admitted Seth.

"You all better not go anigh Black Jack a.ı' better stay cleah away f'm Black Jack's island. He ain't like white boys as come f'm de Palace. Ah reckon Black Jack chew you all up."

CHAPTER VII

ORGANIZING ROUND TABLE PATROL

To reach the island the boys found that they must go to the river bank and follow a mere wagon track back along the river until they were almost parallel with the Palace again. It seemed that, after all, they were near neighbors to Black Jack.

The island lay close to the river bank, a vigorous channel of some fifty feet rushing between. It looked desolate and uninhabited, and from where the boys stood they could see no landing place. A rank growth of tall weeds and brush grew right down to the water's edge. It was not an inviting place for strangers to call.

"If Charlie lives on that island, he must live in a hole that he pulls in after he goes in," said Shadow. "There certainly isn't any sign of a landing place."

"Don't be so sure," said Seth. "We can see the west and north banks, but not the others. The logical place for a landing would be the south side, where it is protected. And see, there's a shack

on the south side with smoke coming from the chimney."

"I'll swim over if you like," volunteered Scotty, who was brave enough about such matters.

"You'd find it a chilly swim this time of year," said Seth.

"It wouldn't hurt me any," boasted Scotty.

"If any one swims over, I'll be the one," said Seth. "But the only person we want is Charlie. That's all the name we know. Tell you what, we'll all call out 'Charlie.' First we'll do it all together. Then we'll shout one after the other, with five counts between, following our patrol order. I'm first, then Ping, then Shadow, then Pansy, then Scotty.

"Now, all together, 'Charrrrr-lee! Charlie! Charlie! Charlie! Charlie! Charlie!' "

There was a faintly audible sound that might have been a reply, although it was very uncertain. Then, from the south end of the island a light boat shot out and the scouts saw that their shouting had been successful.

"I wonder who's pulling the boat?" said Shadow. "Hope it isn't the fierce Black Jack himself, or we may be in for a cyclone."

"It isn't," said Seth; "it's Charlie. He looks bigger because he's raised up in the boat, and he's pretty

solid across the shoulders, anyway. But that's Charlie. Who'd look for a chap with his deformity to have so much strength?"

"Sometimes they get to be as strong as any one," volunteered Ping. "Usually the trouble is tuberculosis of the spine. You'd think it would spoil all their strength, but sometimes after they have become deformed they conquer the disease and then their bones set pretty solid, and they get to be real strong and healthy, even if they are deformed. If they aren't too far along, cases like that can be made straight, as well as strong."

"Wouldn't it be fine if Charlie could get straight?" asked Pansy. "He'd be a wonderfully smart man."

"He's going to be a smart man as he is," said Seth. "He's been so different from every one else down here that he's taken to reading and study, and it's made another boy of him."

"See," said Shadow, "he's motioning for us to come down along the bank. Probably there's some kind of landing."

They reached a rude landing place just as Charlie swung the boat up to it. He was not perceptibly winded after his pull.

"Did you all come down to look for me?" he asked. "I was sure I heard you calling."

"You're right. That's just what you heard. We are the Round Table Patrol of Ozark Troop, No. 1, Boy Scouts of America. We've saved a place for you and we wanted you to know it."

"You mean that I can be a Boy Scout?" asked Charlie.

"That's it," said Seth. "We need you in this Ozark Troop."

"Say, you aren't fooling me, now? But you wouldn't fool a fellow like me, I know you wouldn't. You surely mean it. So I can be a Boy Scout, and learn the things Scouts do and win merit badges and everything. Oh, it's great, perfectly great!"

The little fellow turned away and brushed his sleeve across his eyes. Seth felt a dimming moisture in his own eyes as he realized that this simple privilege was perhaps the greatest distinction that had ever come into the life of this native of the Ozarks.

"You can wear the uniform, too," said Shadow.

"Yes, I'll get the people of this country so well acquainted with the Boy Scout uniform that they'll be glad to see it come," said Charlie. "I reckon I'll have to save up and have a special one made for me, but that won't hurt me any."

"We want just one other boy, too," said Seth.

"We have six, counting you. Ping says the engineer at the Lodge has a boy who is big enough to be a Scout, so that'll leave just one more to get. If you know of a boy who would fit"—

"I know a good many who would fit," replied Charlie. "They'll be suspicious about it at first. But when I get a chance to explain how it is they'll like the idea. It's just the very thing for them. You see, though I didn't know I'd ever get to be a Scout, I've read all about Scouting—your oath and your laws, and your campcraft and your woodcraft. Why, it's just the very thing for these boys here in the hills. All they need is a little education. I'd like to have a chance to bring in twenty instead of one."

"All right," agreed Seth, "you can do that, too. There's room for only one more boy in Round Table Patrol, but Ozark Troop, No. 1, can have several patrols. You can start a patrol just as soon as we get you initiated."

"If I can, I surely will. Oh, it's just great! The thing I want most is to get these boys of the hill set on the right track. They're not bad boys; they're good boys who haven't had much chance. This is just their chance."

All this time the boys had been standing around

the landing place, and Charlie had remained in the boat.

"Do you mind taking us over to the island?" asked Ping suddenly.

Charlie hesitated a moment. "Get in!" he said at last. "The boat will take all of you that short trip. Jack doesn't like people on the island, but he never told me not to bring any one. I'm sure you fellows won't hurt anything."

"Who's Jack—your father?" asked Shadow.

"No, I haven't any father or mother. They both died long ago. My father was a kind of doctor and once he fixed up Jack when he was pretty badly hurt, so when father died and left me all alone Jack took me in."

As they rounded the south end of the island, the boys readily saw why it was used for a landing place. There was a sheltered little cove, large enough for several boats to run in. A shelving, pebbled beach made a solid landing place. A wooden dock had been built a few feet out into the water, and along this several small boats were fastened. On the beach several nets were spread out, and fishing and camping apparatus lay scattered about.

"Jack makes his living taking parties of men along the river fishing," explained Charlie. "He knows

every turn of this river, and the people he guides can make good catches when others can't get a thing. Sometimes he just rents the boats, but usually he plans the whole trip. He's away just now, but he may get back any time."

"How do the people who want him get over to the island?" asked Seth.

"Oh, they don't come here," the boy replied. "He goes down to the railroad station at Greenripe, five miles down the river, where he has a better place than this, and they start out from there. Jack only uses this for a place to stay when he isn't busy."

"Not many people know about this island, I reckon?" said Seth.

"Not many. Some of the hill people come over to see Jack now and then."

"Does Jack own it?"

"Oh, no. This is a navigable stream and the island is controlled by the Federal Government, but there's nothing to show it."

"I just wondered if Jack would sell out his interest?"

"Sell? Why, he hasn't anything to sell. Just the same, Jack wouldn't leave here. He's stubborn; any one will tell you that Jack's stubborn. He's used this island so many years every one calls it

Black Jack's Island and he's kind of proud of it. Why would any one else want it?"

"I don't know that they would. I'm sure I wouldn't have anything to do with taking it from him if he wasn't perfectly willing, but I've got a scheme that's been in my head all morning, and growing so big I'm afraid it's going to break right through. I got up early this morning to talk things over with Mr. Eastcome. One of the chief troubles of the Wildheath Fruit Ranch is the fact that there are seven miles of bad hills between the nearest railroad station and the ranch. It's my job to learn all about those roads before the fruit is ready to be shipped, and be prepared to move our trucks over them. I'm going to do it, too. But ever since I saw this river I've been thinking what a fine thing it would be to get a motor boat and find a market at one of the river towns. This little place is just the dock for a motor boat. It would lie up here as pretty as a new car in a concrete garage, and there's enough room so that it wouldn't interfere the least bit with Black Jack's boats."

"No, it would not," admitted Charlie, "but I'm not sure that he would be willing. I wonder why Mr. Eastcome hasn't tried motor boats before?"

"I don't know," said Seth. "I mean to ask him,

though, and if he's willing to buy one, I believe it would pay us. If we can't use this dock we can build one at the river bank that will answer the purpose, though it won't be so safe."

CHAPTER VIII

SETH FIGHTS A WILD CAT

"Do you use a motor boat, Charlie?" asked Ping.

"No. I have seen them but never been on one yet. Jack has a very wild prejudice against them. He gets notions of that kind pretty easily. He uses sailboats and rowboats and thinks they should be good enough for any one."

"But how do you get all your stuff that you need to keep house?"

"How do you get your eats?" added Pansy.

"That's easy enough," replied Charlie, with a smile. "We don't live in any great luxury, as you can see. We never have to haul coal because the driftwood supplies all the fuel we need. We can get all the fish we want. Water is right handy, as you notice. Jack brings up some groceries whenever he comes from Greenripe; and so we get along."

"Pretty nicely, too, I reckon," agreed Pansy. "But I think I should like some one to come over once or twice a week and bake up a batch of cookies."

"I can do that, myself," laughed Charlie. "Just as soon as I get to be a First Class Scout I'm going after a merit badge on that. Now tell me what I can do that will help you most."

"You can act as a guidebook and a general information bureau," said Seth. "We want to know these people who live around here. We want them to know that we come here as friends. We want to learn a little of the neighborhood."

"I'll go back with you and go with you to a couple of places," Charlie volunteered. "We'll go to Meanards to see Jerry Meanard and then on to Bainscot's to see young Lije. Jerry Meanard is my best friend. He is the boy I would like to have join the first patrol. Lije Bainscot is a regular wildcat but if we get him lined up as a scout he'll be top notch."

Charlie rowed them back to the mainland and tied up his boat. "You came along the river road, didn't you?" he asked. "You need not have done that. You see Wildheath Ranch is only a few hundred yards away and there is nothing to prevent you from cutting through. It is safer than traveling around by the road as well as a lot shorter."

"What do you mean by safer?"

"You won't meet any one; that's what I mean. Our people are awfully good to folks they like.

But they have always felt bitter towards the Wildheath people."

"How about these folks we are going to see now?"

"The Meanards are all right. They are educated people. Judge Meanard is dead now, but he was a college man, and all the family are well raised. The Bainscots are awfully good people, too; but they aren't as safe as some. Old Lije is a leader in these parts; and he claims to be a dead shot. He carries a rifle, even when he goes to church. But after you get to know him you'll find him to be a dandy fellow."

"You want us to talk to young Lije about scouting?"

"Yes. I want him to know all about it. He will be the best scout in this State if he goes into it. This is an awfully critical time for him. He's a wild boy and he is running with the wildest men in the hills—moonshiners and all that. His mother is almost broken-hearted. If we can bring Lije into good company we shall have won the whole Bainscot clan, and that means a lot of the best people in this country."

"Lead us along," said Seth. "That is just the kind of work we want to do."

It was well that Seth was a good driver and the truck a sturdy vehicle, or there would have been great difficulty in following the hill roads along which Charlie directed them. There were dips and hollows, and there were spots in which the road seemed to have given up the job entirely. There were several fords, and at least one of them should have been crossed by ferry. But at last they drove into a comfortable yard and stopped before a neat, comfortable house that would have been a credit to any community.

"This is Meanard's," announced Charlie. "I'll call Jerry out here and we can settle our business with him in ten seconds, for I know he will like nothing better than to be a scout."

Jerry was in the barn taking care of a sick calf. He was a self-reliant boy of fifteen, almost as big as Seth. He came out to the truck after Charlie had explained matters to him. He was evidently a little confused, for outside company was rare in that country.

"Charlie told me why you've come," he said. "I got to go right back to my sick heifer, but I just want to say I'll be pow'ful pleased at going into being a scout. I've read scout books. You can count on me."

He rushed back to the barn as if the sick heifer was in serious danger.

"He's mighty fine," said Charlie. "But he's one of these shy boys. Being a scout will do him a lot of good."

"The next is your friend Bainscot," said Seth. "I suppose he won't be so willing?"

"He won't know so much about it," said Charlie. "Now, we must leave the truck here and strike through the woods for the Bainscot place. It isn't far."

But before they had won through the first stretch of woodland they met with a serious interruption. A shot was heard and a rifle bullet sped so near that it cut a branch from a tree just above Seth's head.

"Stop right thar," ordered a commanding voice. "Charlie Baxter, you turn them revnoo officers about face an' march back the way you all come."

The crippled boy showed no sign of fear, not even halting his pace.

"That's you, Lije Bainscot," he shouted. "I know your voice. You know me a whole lot better than to think I'm bringing revenue officers up here. These are Boy Scouts; good friends of mine, and they want to be friends of yours. Don't be a

coward with your shooting. Come out and meet them."

There must have been a sharp sting in these words for young Elijah Bainscot, for he came tearing down the side of the hill and dashed into the little group like a fury.

"Nobody calls me a coward an' lives," he shouted. "Hunchback or straight, I ain't takin' no sech language."

Charlie stood his ground until the wild boy of the hills, taller even than Seth, seized him by the shoulders and forced him back against a tree trunk.

"That'll do," called Seth. "Don't hurt that boy."

"Who says I won't hurt him?" demanded Lije, turning upon Seth, in a tremendous rage. "I ain't feared of ye. I ain't feared of neither man nor mountain lion. I ain't feared of nothin' in the woods. I ain't feared of nothin' in the towns. Come on, all of ye to wunst. I ain't feared of no revnoo officers."

"We aren't revenue officers," said Seth. "Look at the uniforms we wear, and you will see the letters B. S. A. That means Boy Scouts of America. We are here to ask you to join us and be a Boy Scout yourself."

"He called me a coward!" exclaimed Lije, jumping up into the air, cracking his heels together, and then marking a line with his toe where he had landed. "I got to lick somebody. I'll lick anybody as crosses thet line."

Seth made a quick decision. He was not a rowdy. He did not love to fight. But he saw the type of boy with whom he was dealing and without so much as waiting to roll up his sleeves he stepped across the line.

Lije jumped for him like one of the mountain lions he was so apt in defying. He put a tremendous punch into the blow that he delivered at Seth's head; but Seth was too well-trained in physical culture to allow his head to remain in the way of such a blow. He dodged under the outstretched arm of his opponent and tapped him lightly over a vital spot at the same moment.

The young wildcat of the hills recovered himself and was back in a second, fiercely trying to clinch. Seth's best judgment told him that nothing would do but a sharp decision, and the quicker the better. He took one or two ugly raps himself in watching for a good opening. Then he saw his chance, and quick as a flash he planted two quick clean blows on his opponent's jaw. Lije swayed a moment, strug-

gled to get his balance, toppled backwards and, as he fell, his head struck the trunk of a tree.

"Hope I haven't hurt him badly," said Seth.

"He'll come to in a minute," said Charlie, who was bending over the boy. "It was the fall against the tree that did most damage. It's just what he needed and it would have been good for Lije if some one had done it a year ago."

Lije was already opening his eyes.

"I ain't feared of neither man nor mountain lion," he chanted. "But what was it you said. Was it Boy Scout? I want to jine. Let me be a Boy Scout. Tell me what ye do an' how ye do it. An', say; I want a uniform!"

CHAPTER IX

PATROLLING WILDHEATH RANCH

Seth Payson quickly realized that one of the chief difficulties in guarding Wildheath Fruit Ranch lay in the fact that it was scattered over a vast stretch of territory. Land was plentiful but not of uniform quality. A good place had been found for a plantation of young peach trees in one spot, and perhaps the next part of the ranch in cultivation would be half a mile away. Fortunately the fruits requiring the most intensive cultivation were comparatively near to the ranch house.

Mr. Eastcome's expert gardeners, who lived at the ranch house, were too few in number and too busy at their work to guard the whole property from the ravages of marauders, and it was this work for which Seth and his scouts were especially responsible.

"Do you fellows remember what I told you about this place the day I asked you to come?" asked Seth of Ping and Pansy.

"I know what you mean," admitted Ping. "You said we were coming down here for work."

"That's the word," said Seth. "And the work begins to-morrow morning. The chief obstacle to the success of this fruit ranch at present seems to be the damage done by animals and people. We shall have to establish a regular patrol and try to cover all parts of the ranch once or twice a day."

"Shall we have horses to ride?" asked Pansy.

"I've asked about that. There is only one horse to be had just at present. I think the fellow who takes the patrol farthest from the ranch should have that valuable animal. He's blind of one eye and his teeth tell me that he's too old to be a Boy Scout, but I reckon he can carry a lightweight like Pansy and keep going all day."

"I don't want a horse," said Pansy. "I'm training down. Let Shadow have him."

"Why should I take the only horse?" asked Shadow. "Leave him for Seth, I say."

"I'll take him," volunteered Ping. "I suppose that means I'll get the farthest patrol. Reckon Pansy was afraid he'd get too far away to hear the dinner bell."

"There won't be any dinner bell," said Seth. "I'll take you out in the morning in the truck, and

you'll take your grub with you. When you think it time to eat you can cook it up any way you like. That makes good scouting. In the evening I'll come out after you; but of course Ping will have his trusty charger and won't need me."

"What will you do?" asked Pansy.

"I'm going to take Scotty under my wing, and together we will look after the small fruits near the ranch house. That suit you, Scotty?"

"It sure will," said Scotty. "I ain't feared of anybody s' long as you're around."

"Feel better to-day, don't you, Scotty. Think you'll be ready to be initiated into Round Table Patrol next week."

"Yes, sir. It's awful good of you boys to let me come in. I know I ain't much account, and I don't have no courage, nor no chin, nor nothin'."

"You must stop that kind of talk, Scotty, now that you are going to be a scout. All boys may be of some account and be brave and amount to something. I think you will have more of a chin when you learn to lift up your head, too, old boy. You'll learn all these things now that you are going to be a scout. They belong to you. All you need do is to reach out for them."

"How about Lije Bainscot?" asked Shadow. "Can we rely on him?"

"Charlie thinks so. He was by here a little while ago. He saw Lije again this evening and he believes our mountain lion is strong for it. Lije is anxious to have his patrol called the Wildcats!"

"Good name! That's a dandy name. Lije is just my idea of a Wildcat. Who will get them ready for initiation?"

"Charlie will attend to that. Now that he has Lije in the notion he doesn't think it will be a very hard job. Everybody turn in, now. We are going to get up a little before the sun, and to-morrow we shall begin showing Mr. Eastcome that he has made a good bargain."

Seth was keenly anxious that Mr. Eastcome should have a good bargain in every way. He was constantly thinking and planning for the work. When he was quite sure that the plan was practical, he told the idea of the motor boat to Mr. Eastcome.

"Fine! Splendid!" he declared. "I don't know why we haven't tried it before. I suppose that's the English of it. It had never been done, you see. You Yankee chaps are trained to look for new things all the time. Doctor Pingree, too, will be glad to

use the motor boat for his supplies and passengers. Can one of you run a motor boat?"

"I can," said Seth. "And young Jabez Jillson, the engineer's boy at the Lodge, thinks he can run one. We're taking him in to-night at our initiation of Round Table Patrol. We would like very much to have you come and witness that initiation as our guest, sir."

"That's another good idea, my boy, that patrol of Boy Scouts. I hope you'll get a patrol of the native sons, too. But that won't be easy."

"We are leaving that entirely to Charlie. He knows all about them. He's a remarkable boy, even if he is deformed."

"Yes, he's a very remarkable lad. But I've rather come to expect that in these deformed boys, Seth. I have met a good many of them in my life. Some of them have been spurred on by the very nature of their handicap. They tell me great tales of this Charlie Baxter. He has studied at home and at all possible times. He has a little school off in the woods, where he teaches the year round."

"Yes, sir. I found out about that school, too. That's where we plan to have our initiation to-night."

"Why not have it here or at the Palace?"

"Well, sir, we are initiating two boys who are outsiders, and we are inviting a lot of the hill boys. Charlie Baxter thinks he can get up a patrol of the hill boys, and they will be the second patrol of Ozark Troop, No. 1."

"That's fine work, if it can be done. And how goes the other patrol, the job of patrolling the fruit ranch?"

"It has done very well to-day, sir. I reported to you yesterday about the Arkansas razorbacks that had been turned in by some one to root up the young trees. They spoiled a good many, but the trees there can stand thinning out. That was on Pingree's patrol. Walter Flowers, the boy we call Pansy, has the next stretch. He found where some trees had been broken by a wagon being driven over them to-day. We think it won't happen again. My cousin, the one we call Shadow, you know, has the next; there's nothing wrong on his. Scotty and I together watch the part nearest the ranch house. We've found no trouble. You can see Scotty, now, coming over the hill. He is nearly a mile away."

"Very good. I think when the natives find that you Boy Scouts are on the job, they'll have a care. What's that boy Scotty doing now? It looks as if he's in a fight."

"He is!" declared Seth, as soon as he looked. "He has a club and he's using it. I must go to him."

Mr. Eastcome followed, but Seth easily outran him. As soon as the man who was fighting Scotty saw that help was coming, he turned and ran for the woods. Scotty did not follow. Instead he halted and waited for Seth to come up.

"I'm going after that fellow," shouted Seth, as he reached the boy. "You needn't come if you don't feel like it."

"Don't go!" begged Scotty. "Leave him alone. That isn't one of the hill men."

"Who is it then," asked Seth.

"It's that doctor," declared Scotty. "He's after me. He wants that paper I've got, the paper with the combination. Say, did you see how I went for him with my club? It's the first time I wasn't afraid!"

"Good for you," said Seth. "Why weren't you afraid?"

"Oh, I reckon partly because I saw you coming to help. Then, another thing, you've taken me into your patrol. I'm a scout, now. I couldn't let myself be a disgrace to the Round Table Patrol."

"Good for you!" cried Seth. "You're getting

better every minute. Soon you'll begin to forget that nonsense about the doctor and you'll recognize a hill man for a hill man. Here's Mr. Eastcome, now. Let me tell him all about it."

"Not yet," said Scotty, "not yet. Really, I'm not ready for that yet."

CHAPTER X

WILDCAT PATROL

The little schoolhouse in the woods in which Scout Charlie Baxter taught all who would come, no matter what their age, was located with especial reference to the convenience of its pupils. It was not near town, for the town had one school. The schoolhouse had once been a stable, and its conversion had been made by simply cutting four windows and laying a slab floor. The wide barn door had been nailed shut and a narrow door cut in the side. Two lamps, borrowed from neighbors, supplied the illumination for the evening Boy Scout performance.

Before half-past seven Seth and his comrades were at the school. They had expected to find a crowd there, and were greatly disappointed that they themselves were the first arrivals. In a few minutes, however, Mr. Eastcome, Doctor Pingree, and young Jabez Jillson arrived.

"Mr. Jillson would have liked to come," explained Doctor Pingree, "but with the way things have been

happening at the Palace lately, one of us ought to be there."

"You see him?" whispered Seth to Scotty. "That's the doctor. He's going to be our scoutmaster. Now I don't want to hear any more nonsense from you about the doctor."

"That isn't my doctor, at all," said Scotty. "I know him only too well. He never did look like that."

"Where are the rest of those to be initiated?" asked Doctor Pingree. "We will proceed at once."

"Here they are now, sir," announced Seth. "I hear them coming."

He had thought that he heard the sound of many voices, but no one came in except Charlie and his recruit, Jerry Meanard.

"Shall we wait for other people to come, Charlie?" asked Seth. "I thought that there would be quite a crowd of fellows here—those you were going to get for the Wildcat Patrol."

"Don't wait," counseled Charlie. "Just go ahead with the ceremonies, and don't any one pay any attention to the windows or doors. If they come in, all right. If they don't, all right."

Doctor Pingree knew a great deal about scouting. When he lived in Bushville he had been a scout-

master. He had brought with him a small American flag. This he handed to Seth, thus installing him as color bearer.

"I am going to make a little opening speech," he said in a clear, ringing voice that could be heard not only in the little schoolhouse, but far beyond it. "It isn't that I like to make speeches or that I think you like to hear them, but I feel that this is the most important occasion that has come to this part of the country in many years, and it must not be passed over lightly. It is important because boys make men. It is important because good boys make good men, and scouting makes good boys. It is important because the boys of this country can make themselves into the best scouts in all America. They need to be scouts and scouts need them. Half a million Boy Scouts all over this country stretch out their hands to you to-night. They give you their welcome. 'Shake hands, brothers,' they say. 'We need you and you need us.' They are anxious that you should have everything that America can give you. And—hear me now—America offers real value to her boys through the Boy Scouts of America. She offers this to you boys who are here forming the Round Table Patrol of Ozark Troop, No. 1, Boy Scouts of America.

"The following are duly declared members of Round Table Patrol:

"First-class Scout, Seth Payson.

"First-class Scout, Pingree Lewis.

"Second-class Scout, Ernest Lawless.

"Second-class Scout, Walter Flowers.

"You four Scouts being duly admitted, and having already gained rank as stated, require no further initiation. You are the nucleus of the Round Table Patrol.

"A patrol should consist of eight members, and therefore you have brought four recruits. What scouts will vouch for these recruits?"

"I for William Scott," said Seth.

"I for Jabez Jillson," said Ping.

"I for Jeremiah Meanard," said Pansy.

"I for Charles Baxter," said Shadow.

"You will stand in your places and remain standing while each couple approaches the flag and separately gives the Pledge of Allegiance, repeating it slowly and distinctly."

Seth and Scotty approached first and each saluted. Then with Seth leading in his strong clear voice, and Scotty trailing along behind, stumbling a little, yet very earnest, they repeated, "I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands:

one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Jillson and Ping, Meanard and Pansy followed, and at last came the turn for the little dwarf, Charles Baxter, and Shadow.

There was no faltering now. In a clear, ringing voice the dwarf repeated the pledge, and so erect did he hold himself that he seemed almost straight. There were tears in his eyes, but no sob in his voice. Shadow, who never had been very good at reciting from memory, could only humbly follow.

When the boys stepped back in line after this ceremony, they found that the room behind them was full of hill boys. The boys had listened at door and windows, many of them with the fervor of adoration, but when it came to their own brother of the hills giving this wonderful pledge, they had stolen in, one by one, in a silence that had not disturbed the ceremony a particle. Who could tell? If one of their tribe was fit for this, why not all?

Doctor Pingree continued the initiation ceremony as if unaware of their presence, until at last he reached the place where he gave to each of the candidates the scout sign and the scout oath so familiar to the boys from Bushville.

On my honor I will do my best:

1. To do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the scout law;

2. To help other people at all times;

3. To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

"You are now scouts of Round Table Patrol of Ozark Troop, No. 1. Be diligent in scoutcraft, let the oath and pledge that you have taken to-night be no mere form of words, but let it be burned into your hearts, and may its brand stamp you indelibly as scouts. Every day you will do your good turn. Constantly you will seek advancement in scoutcraft. There are many things for you to learn, for the crown of scouting is not gained at a single bound. Move forward. Honor your name as scout. Honor the Round Table Patrol. Honor the Ozark Troop, No. 1. Honor the Boy Scouts of America."

He paused as if in doubt whether to close the ceremony, and suddenly a voice piped up from the crowd at the door: "How about this here Wildcat Patrol? Who gits into that?"

"Wildcat Patrol may be organized at once and may become a part of Ozark Troop, No. 1," declared Scoutmaster Pingree. "Let the candidates for Wildcat Patrol step forward."

There was an anxious pause. No one came. It

seemed that, after all, the organization of Wildcat Patrol would fail for lack of candidates.

Suddenly from the rear of the room sprang a lanky youth of fifteen with a hop, skip, and a jump. Landing in front of the speaker's stand, he jumped up in the air, cracked his heels together, marked with his toe the place where he landed, and declared: "I ain't feared of neither man nor mountain lion! Make a scout outen me, an' lessee who'll be the next."

That was enough. In a minute there were far more than the eight boys needed by the patrol, crowding for space.

"Let me say again," said Doctor Pingree, "that the Boy Scout fraternity is the finest thing for boys in America. It is so fine a thing that it can be approached only in a serious spirit. It requires a little preparation. Before a candidate may be admitted as a tenderfoot he must have learned the scout oath and law, he must know how to tie certain knots, he must know the history of our national flag. To some of you these things may seem trivial. But they are reasonable things. The Boy Scouts of America will accept no sudden enthusiasm. It desires fixed purpose. It tests the earnestness of its candidate in these simple ways. All of you may be

considered candidates for membership in Ozark Troop, No. 1, and at a later meeting all of you may be admitted. But to-night we can admit only those who have already done the preliminary work. Those who are prepared, then, will remain standing here. Others must please wait until their preliminary work is done."

The sudden young man, Elijah Bainscot, who feared neither man nor mountain lion, was among those to stay. Others dropped back until it seemed doubtful if Wildcat Patrol would have a full quota. But the mountain-lion scout was ready for this. He had foreseen that backslidings might occur, so he called out by name those whom he knew were ready, and insisted that they stand up and be initiated as Wildcat Scouts ought to be.

Thus came into existence Ozark Troop, No. 1, with two patrols, and while the Round Table Patrol knew more about the work, it was not unlikely that the Wildcat Patrol, having loyally accepted the leadership of Scoutmaster Pingree, would be of more real value to the community, for all its members were native boys.

CHAPTER XI

WAS IT A GORILLA?

Seth had managed to get his truck as far as the schoolhouse, so the Wildheath people had the opportunity of riding home, and were soon at the gates of the Palace grounds.

Just as they reached there, the car used for driving patients to and from the railroad station was passing out. The driver stopped as he saw the truck and asked for Doctor Pingree.

"Here I am," said Doctor Pingree. "Who is it and what seems to be the trouble?"

"It's Ferguson, Doctor," said the man. "Wait there a moment and I'll come over and tell you."

Ferguson acted as bookkeeper, clerk, and general supervisor of the sanitarium. He walked over to the truck and began to explain his difficulties in a low voice.

"It's Mr. Edmonds and Mr. Cathers, Doctor. You know how nervous they were, but they've been getting better. They were out for a walk in the grounds when you left here. A little while after

that they came running in all out of breath, and so pale and white they looked like corpses. They declared that they had seen a gorilla. It was a large animal about eight feet tall and seemed as big as two men. You know, sir, it's only a few days since Mr. Edmonds had that mountain lion jump out at him. So this was too much for him, and he decided he would go home this very night on the ten o'clock train. Mr. Cathers was bound he'd do the very same thing. Nothing I could say made any difference. They wouldn't even wait for you to get back home. So there they are. I'm taking them to the station."

The Doctor had listened in silence. "I'll go over and talk to them," he said. "I think I can convince them that they are perfectly safe. If they go back east with a story like that it will make lots of trouble for me. Of course it's perfectly absurd, and no one with an ounce of sense would believe such a story, but I'm dealing with patients who have lost control of their nerves and will believe anything. I think I can get them to give up the idea of leaving."

He went over to the car and for several minutes he argued with the excited passengers. But evidently they were obdurate. He came back, looking very much disturbed.

"No good!" he announced. "They're bound to go. But Ferguson is very much afraid that he may have trouble getting to the station. He has never made the trip at night."

"I'll drive them, Doctor," volunteered Seth. "I've been making a study of that road every day since I've been here."

"Thank you," said the doctor. "Will you need Ferguson?"

"No. I'll take Scotty. He's a scout now, and he needs a little training like this. You aren't afraid to go, are you, Scotty?"

"Not with you," declared Scotty. "You fellows have made me a Round Table Scout, and I'd rather fight a gorilla than go back on you."

"All right," said Seth. "I'll probably be gone an hour."

"You two boys are going to take us to the station instead of Mr. Ferguson, are you?" asked Mr. Edmonds nervously.

"Yes, sir," said Seth. "I know the road better than Mr. Ferguson does."

"But are you sure it's perfectly safe?"

"Yes, sir. It's just as safe at night as it is in the daytime, isn't it, Scotty?"

"It is to me," said Scotty. "I'm not afraid of

darkness and woods and things. All I'm afraid of is people who beat you and starve you."

"Did some one treat you like that, my boy?" asked Mr. Cathers, who was a member of a humane society at home. "Get back in this seat with us and tell us about it."

As they drove along, Scotty told them a few of the things he had experienced in the last year. He did it rather reluctantly, and with great diffidence, not realizing that in so doing he was adding greatly to its effect.

"And you were treated like that in this enlightened United States?" exclaimed Mr. Edmonds.

"Yes, sir, but I'm not going to be again. I'm a scout now. I've taken the scout oath. I've pledged allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands. Seth told me that having no chin to speak of makes no difference; nothing makes any difference but myself and the confidence I have in God's protection and leading. So I'm not going to be afraid of man or beast any more, because letting myself be afraid is the very thing that will keep me from being the fearless man God made me to be. I never knew much about God, but Seth taught me his favorite verse, and I've made it mine. Want to hear it?"

"Yes. I'd like to. I know a lot of verses myself," said Mr. Cathers.

"It's a nice short verse, but Seth says it makes up in strength what it lacks in length, and it's easy for a boy to remember. 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' Isn't that good?"

"It surely is," said Mr. Cathers, and Mr. Edmonds added, "I like that verse myself."

"Here's the station," cried Seth. He ran in to see if the agent was there, and came back with word that the train was two hours late.

"Two hours!" exclaimed Mr. Edmonds. "Do we have to wait in this little station two hours? What do you say to going back, Cathers?"

"I'm willing enough, if you are," said Mr. Cathers.

So it happened that in less than an hour Seth delivered his passengers again at Wildheath Lodge.

"Back again?" asked Doctor Pingree. "What's wrong. Are the trains not running?"

"The train is two hours late," explained Mr. Cathers. "But there is more to it than that. We know that we are nervous wrecks. Edmonds and I both came here to get better. This little chap has been telling us some of the things he has gone through, and we are both rather ashamed of ourselves. We

haven't given you much of a chance. Probably we saw a big dog or something of that kind. We will stay until our minds don't fool us so badly."

"Fine!" exclaimed Doctor Pingree. "I'm sure we can help you if you give us time. Your rooms are all ready for you, just as if you had only been out for an evening ride."

After the men had gone the doctor shook hands with great enthusiasm with the two boys.

"You surely have done Wildheath Sanitarium a good turn to-night, boys," he said. "If they had gone off to-night, there would have been plenty to follow them to-morrow. Now, you sit down here, and I'm going to have the cook send up a real feed for you. Then, instead of going to the Ranch by way of the gate, I want you to drive the car over, so as to take a load of stuff Mr. Eastcome wants."

Under the beneficent influences of hot cocoa, chicken salad, jam and cake, Seth turned upon Scotty with a question.

"What do you think of the doctor now?" he asked. "Is he a black villain? Is he a man to fear? Would he beat you and chase you?"

"Doctor Pingree? Do you mean Doctor Pingree?" asked Scotty.

"Of course I do," replied Seth. "Doctor Pin-

gree is superintendent of this place. He is the man you were so afraid to meet that you tried to run away from our house the very first night I met you. He's the doctor from whom you were hiding the first night I came to Wildheath Ranch."

"I reckon it ain't any good my talking to you if you think I'm as crazy as all that," replied Scotty. "Next to Mr. Eastcome, Doctor Pingree is the very best man in all the world. I reckon you do think I'm crazy."

"Well, you're getting better," said Seth. "You aren't crazy all the time now. I suppose it just comes on you by spells. You are getting brave, too. You know that you can be just as brave as any one, don't you?"

"I know I can," Scotty agreed. "I'm going to be brave, too. If I do get hurt now and then, it won't kill me. I can stand it. I'm not forgetting what you told me. It's better to be brave all the time and get hurt once in a while, than it is to be frightened of people and things, and always be a fellow sneaking around with his head down, his heart in his mouth, and ready to run from everybody."

"That's the stuff," said Seth heartily. "Keep that in your head and you'll be one of the best

balanced scouts in Round Table Patrol. Now, let's go."

Seth and Scotty drove home in great elation, and once clear of the Palace they made the woods ring with their shouts. As they passed out of the big gates the moon had just begun to give a faint light, by which they saw some one clothed in black waiting for them.

"Here you are," cried Seth, thinking it was one of the ranch people. "We'll carry you over."

But instead of waiting, the figure sprang away into the woods at a peculiar, bounding gait, and as a ray of moonlight struck it, the boys saw that it was not black clothing, but shaggy hide and bristling hair that covered the savage form.

CHAPTER XII

THE SCOUT AND FATHER CELEBRATION

Seth stopped the car almost in a second, for he had been slowing up in expectation of taking on a passenger. Grasping a big wrench that lay in a pocket at the side of the car he sprang out and gave chase to the animal. But it was dark in the woods and the big object moved with lightning rapidity and with such nimbleness that it made no crashing noises that would indicate its progress.

The boy was amazed at the quiet escape of an animal of such size and soon gave up the chase. Halfway back to the car he met Scotty, dragging a young tree.

"I was coming," he explained. "But I thought I'd better get a club first."

"Sure," said Seth. "That was a good idea. But we'll have to give up for to-night. Wonder what that 'critter' was?"

"I don't know," said Scotty. "I thought at first it was one of the boys waiting for us and I was

moving over to make room for him when you stopped and jumped out. What did you think it was?"

"I can't guess," said Seth. "I didn't see it very clearly myself because it got into the shadow in about two jumps, and then it was off in the woods. But I have a very strong suspicion that it was the gorilla which Mr. Edmonds said he saw."

"Why, I never thought there was any real animal; I supposed that was all in those nervous patients' minds. I heard them talking on the way back, and what they said made me think they pretty nearly concluded they hadn't really seen anything after all."

"Well, we won't do anything to spread the news," said Seth. "But we'll tell Mr. Eastcome and Doctor Pingree all about it. They can do as they please. I'm not much afraid of anything I can chase away as I did that fellow, though, are you?"

"I'll tell myself I'm not. I suppose I really am, but I'll insist I'm not. I won't let myself be afraid."

"That's the stuff, Scotty. You're doing yourself proud, old boy. After a little bit you'll forget all those delusions you have about the doctor, too. Now Doctor Pingree is our scoutmaster and you

knew very well he never did you nor any one else any harm."

"No. He never did. But he's not the one that scares me at all. I'm not afraid like I was though. Maybe he'll quit chasing me when he knows I'm not afraid."

But Seth had turned to the boy on guard at the gate of the ranch house and seemed not to hear.

It was Shadow's turn for night watch and he called to them from his post.

"Everybody home?" asked Seth.

"All but you," said Shadow. "Did you ship those two valiant men back home?"

"No, sir. They decided to come back. It was quite a joke. Tell you all about it in the morning. Haven't seen any strange animals around, have you?"

"Not a thing," said Shadow. "I'm looking for razorbacked hogs and mountain lions."

"Is that a good club?"

"That's what it is. It isn't very heavy but it's got the resilience of a tennis racket and the punch of a baseball bat."

"Well, keep your eyes open. Who relieves you at one o'clock?"

"Pansy."

"Tell him to have a club handy, too. Good night."

Seth and Scotty turned into their comfortable bunks and soon were fast asleep.

Two boys divided the night duty—one watching from nine until one and the other from one until five. They were excused from duty in the forenoon.

Mr. Eastcome thought it best not to say too much about the affair of the night before, but the scouts were warned to be on the lookout for any strange animals that might do damage. However, the most dangerous animals seen were the gaunt native hogs and the rabbits that delighted to gnaw the bark of the tender young fruit trees. The days slipped by and the small fruits began to ripen and the berry crop, a bumper crop, too, was about ready to give up its luscious harvest.

Seth and Ping were very much interested in seeing that Ozark Troop No. 1 met every week, and in this they were backed with enthusiasm by their dwarf friend.

"You see, fellows," said Seth, "this fruit ranch is never going to be worth while until its owners make friends with the hill people. Round Table Scouts must make friends with the Wildcat Scouts

and the thicker and quicker the friendship, the better it will be for everybody."

"That's the idea," said Ping. "My uncle says he will be a happy man when he can get the people of this country to understand that he will be just as good a friend to them as they'll let him be, but it's not much good trying to work it with the old folks who have hated the Palace people for thirty years."

"And another thing," added Charlie Baxter; "my boys need you fellows and they need a lot of you. First you must get to be real chums with them and then they'll learn your standards."

"Let's put on a troop meeting for them like we used to have back at Bushville," suggested Shadow. "You know what I mean, Seth."

"And have eats and everything!" suggested Pansy.

"I don't know about eats," Seth objected.

"You ought to know about 'em, then," insisted Pansy. "Maybe it doesn't make so much difference to you. You fill up on first-class stuff three times a day—"

"Well, don't you fill up three times a day, and sometimes four or more?"

"Yes. But my point is that a lot of these Hill boys never do see much but fried mush, corn pone,

sowbelly and molasses. It surely would make an awful hit with 'em to put on something like we did at Bushville when we gave our Scout and Father celebration. Oh, boy; that was surely good eating!" And Pansy smacked his lips in blissful memory.

"Wonder if we could put on a Scout and Father celebration, here," asked Seth. "I don't suppose they're ready for it yet, but even if it didn't go off very big I don't see how it could do any harm."

"Tell me about it," asked Charlie. "I never heard of one."

"It's a chance for the fathers to come to scout meeting and see just what the boys do," explained Seth. "Back in our country they often have Father and Son banquets and such like. We invented the Scout and Father celebration as being a little different and giving us a chance to do the inviting."

"I believe the Wildcat Scouts would be keen to do it," said Charlie. "But I don't know just how many of the fathers would come. That doesn't mean that the hill men aren't good fathers. They will die for their children, any one of them. But they are pretty slow about taking on new things."

"They would come if their own boys asked them?"

"Perhaps, but not sure. Their boys go to school part of the year and most of them get a decent

education. But a lot of these fathers never did have a chance to go to school. They are shut up into an awfully small circle. They are good, but very suspicious of anything new."

"Well, Charlie, you're the doctor when it comes to prescribing for your own people. It's up to you. Shall we try to have a Father and Son celebration or not?"

"Oh, I want you to have it," replied Charlie. "I was just giving you a little warning that you must not be very much disappointed if very few of the fathers come."

"What about the scouts? Will they come?"

"Wildcat Patrol will be there to the last scout," declared Charlie. "You can depend on every one of those fellows. They'll go all the way and then be ready to start over."

"That's the stuff," said Seth. "That's the kind of stuff good scouts are made of. Then we'll hold this Scout and Father celebration and we'll be prepared to be satisfied even if it's all Scout and no Father. How about doing as we did at Bushville. There were some fellows that we knew couldn't get their fathers to come. So we gave them leave to bring any man they chose, to act as father."

"We surely must do that," declared Ping. "Look

at us. We haven't a father between us. But I can get Uncle Ping."

"I'm going to ask the head gardener, Mr. McIntosh, to go as my father," said Seth. "How about you, Scotty."

"I wonder if I might ask Mr. Eastcome," ventured Scotty. "He is the best man in the world. If I had him for a father I'd be the happiest boy alive."

"That cook at the Palace is a dandy fellow," said Pansy. "Maybe if I asked him to go he'd help out on the grub."

"Still thinking of grub, Pansy. How about it, fellows; shall we try to have something to eat? It always helps cordiality a lot if you can get people sitting down at a table."

"Yes, surely!" said Charlie. "You aren't altogether right when you think these boys never get anything good to eat. There is game in the hills, and many of the mothers are splendid cooks. I've eaten a venison patty that you couldn't get in any city. They make peach cobbler that is too delicious to compare with any hotel stuff. They cook chicken and make salads. I'll just say this, you leave it to Wildcat Patrol to get the substantial things of the supper, and get your cook at the

Palace to supply cake and ice cream. Ice is pretty hard to get and some of them have never tasted ice cream in their lives."

"Leave that to me," said Pansy. "They shall have ice cream till their tongues freeze to the palate."

"And how about having this at Wildheath Ranch?" asked Ping.

Charlie shook his head.

"That wouldn't do," he said. "Remember you are just beginning to overcome a prejudice that's been thirty years growing. You can't go as fast as that."

"Shall we have it at your school?"

"That might do, but it would be difficult to get furniture and dishes. I have just the thing, though. Meanard's are hill people and every one knows 'em. They have a nice home. Just the place. We'll have the Scout and Father Celebration at the home of Jerry Meanard, Tenderfoot Scout of Round Table Patrol!"

CHAPTER XIII

ICE CREAM AND CAKE

On the evening of the Scout and Father celebration the boys were called in from their patrol of the ranch one hour early, so that they might have ample time for preparation.

"We shall have a good truckload to carry," said Seth. "There will be six scouts and six fathers, that is if Jabe Jillson manages to get his father to leave the Palace for the evening. Things have been pretty quiet lately, so I think they will venture."

"Did Scotty get Mr. Eastcome to go?"

"Yes, indeed. Said he wouldn't miss it for anything in Arkansas. Said he didn't know when he had heard anything that sounded so good."

"And Ping got Doctor Pingree to go?"

"Yes, and I got Mr. McIntosh, and Pansy got the cook. And believe me, whatever else gets loaded in that truck, the first thing to go in is two big freezers of ice cream that the cook has all ready for us."

"Say, Seth, you forgot to ask about my guest?" said Shadow.

"So I did. Did you get that patient you were talking about?"

"Yes, sir. And he's a real scout father. He has a boy in St. Louis, the place where he lives, who is a star scout. And this man used to be a professional entertainer and he can sing and do all kinds of stunts."

"Fine work. I'm only hoping the Wildcat fathers will do as well as the Round Table."

When the boys drove around to the Palace to load up for the journey they found that the traffic situation was not so bad as they had feared. Doctor Pingree had decided to carry the fathers in his car, thus leaving plenty of room in the truck for the ice cream freezers and the scouts.

"We'll go ahead to show the way," said Seth. "It isn't a very good road. In fact, when we went to see Jerry Meanard the first time, we decided that it was a very bad road. But you can make it if your springs are good and you drive slowly."

It was not until the home of the Meanards came into sight that Seth was reminded of this statement.

"I don't see anything the matter with the road,"

said Pansy. "Seems to me you made a kick about nothing."

"Perhaps you didn't see that the road had been repaired, either," said Seth. "I did, because I was driving. I'll wager my share of all the ice cream in both freezers, strawberry, chocolate or vanilla, that this road has been fixed up in the last two days. And do you prize scholars know why it has been fixed?"

"To make it better," suggested Pansy.

"Clever boy!" said Seth in approval. "You had to go pretty deep for that one, Pansy. And why did these people suddenly desire to make this road better?"

"I'll bet it was because of this Scout and Father celebration," said Shadow.

"Shadow is right! He gets the candy heart! And all of you scouts of Round Table Patrol take notice that herein we see one of the results of organizing the Wild Cats. They begin to improve their roads. Next thing you know they'll be building a new schoolhouse."

"Wouldn't it be fine if they'd build a good school for Charlie to teach in," said Ping. "Wouldn't that boy be happy?"

"Have you never observed that he is happy most

of the time?" asked Shadow. "I suppose not one of us is as poor as Charlie—no father, no mother, nothing but old Black Jack—but you couldn't say that he isn't happy."

"There's worse things than not having father nor mother," it was Scotty who spoke. "It's worse to have somebody chasing after you all the time. But as long as I've got you scouts I'm brave; and I'm happy, too."

"You're all right, Scotty," said Seth. "Pretty soon you'll forget that any one ever chased you."

Scotty reached up to whisper in his ear. "Don't believe it. Saw him to-night again. He was in a boat near Black Jack's Island. After a little while Black Jack came and spoke to him. But I'm not going to be afraid. We won't say a word about it."

"That's the stuff," said Seth reassuringly. "We'll forget all about it. The more you forget the quicker he'll disappear."

"You think I didn't see him," said Scotty shrewdly. "I did, though; and it doesn't make so much difference to me now, but every time I've seen him before, something has happened."

"Well, this is a party to-night. Let's forget it," said Seth, who had quite made up his mind that the

best treatment for Scotty was to persistently ignore his delusions.

Most of the hill people were already at the Meanard home when the boys reached there, and it was but a few minutes later when the car arrived that carried the "fathers" of the Round Table group. Doctor Pingree, who, being scoutmaster, was to be general master of ceremonies, had made up his mind that no time must be allowed for any guest to feel awkward. There must be something going on every moment.

There were two applicants for admission to Wildcat Patrol. Their initiation would be the first special work after the troop had gone through its regular order of business. The Meanard farm was fortunate in having a long and fairly well constructed building which had formerly been used for storage. The scouts of Wildcat Patrol had put this in splendid order, so that it was just the place for their meeting, and also for the supper that was to follow.

It was with rapt interest that these men of the hills witnessed a scout ceremony for the first time and realized that their own sons were engaged in it. Some of them were veterans; and as Shadow, an excellent bugler, played the Assembly, and the

call to Attention, they thrilled with the touch of the old days. It must have stirred their hearts deeply as they saw the flag unfurled and their sons, standing at attention, give the salute to the flag. They listened in quiet, reverent wonder, as this group, hill boys and city boys alike, gave the Pledge of Allegiance and then repeated the scout oath.

Mr. Eastcome, perhaps the most interested observer present, needed no one to tell him that this was a great success.

"It's the best thing ever; the best thing ever!" he was saying to himself. Then Charlie Baxter, a familiar figure to all the hill people, rose to his feet.

"There are two among us who seek admission to our ranks," he announced.

"If there are such, they will stand and give their names," said the scoutmaster.

There was an anxious moment of waiting, for, keen as these boys were to be taken into the new organization, it was a terrible ordeal for them to rise to their feet and thus push their shrinking bodies into prominence. One of them came to himself after a vigorous pinch from Elijah and jumped hastily up. The other waited for no such stimulation.

"The first candidate gives his name as Jared Fleming," said the scoutmaster. "He desires admission to rank as tenderfoot in Wildcat Patrol of Ozark Troop No. 1. Who will vouch for Jared Fleming?"

Patrol Leader Lije was on his feet like a flash. Whoever else might be awed, he was not.

"I vouch for Jared!" he said. "Jared will make one mighty good scout. He ain't afeared of neither man nor mountain lion."

"It is well. The sponsor may take his stand to the left of the applicant," said the scoutmaster. "The second candidate is Angus Powers. He desires admission to rank as tenderfoot in Wildcat Patrol. Who will vouch for Angus Powers?"

"I, First Class Scout Seth Payson, will vouch for Angus Powers," came the announcement in Seth's deep voice.

"It is well. We will now carry the scout law to these candidates."

One after the other came the twelve remaining scouts of Round Table and Wildcat patrols. Each one gripped the hand of first one candidate and then the other, looked them squarely in the eyes, and repeated in a clear voice a section of the scout law; the first carrying the message "A Scout is trust-

worthy," and the twelfth finishing with the significant, final law, "A Scout is reverent."

When all was concluded the scouts closed up into compact formation, surrounding the two candidates. The two new members were then instructed in the scout sign, and, standing at attention, hands raised to salute, the whole body, candidates included, repeated the scout oath.

To Mr. Eastcome it was a most impressive ceremony. During the last part, in which all of the boys repeated the oath, he felt a heavy hand gripping his shoulder. He was too much interested to attempt to displace it, but at the end he turned to look into the face of a big mountaineer who stood just behind him.

"I'm 'feared I was mussin' yore coat, stranger," said the man, in an attempt at apology. "I reckon ye won't hold it agen me. I'm Fleming. That there new scout, Jared, he's my leetle chap. It's fust time he ever had a chanct at anything o' this sort. I aimed to be sure he done it right."

"Shake hands, Mr. Fleming," said Mr. Eastcome. "I congratulate you on having a boy who can be a Boy Scout. It's a splendid thing to be a Boy Scout father. I have never had that good fortune, except as I adopt some boy as I'm doing to-night."

It was evident that many Boy Scout mothers had gathered at the Meanard home as well as the fathers. Now that the ceremony of the meeting was over they were actively at work, directing the men and boys in the preparation of tables and seats in the same room in which the meeting had been held.

Seth was among the most active in seeing that every one was employed. He did not care so much about the effectiveness of the work; his concern was to see that all were employed and no one feeling neglected.

Suddenly he heard his name called loudly, in tones of great distress. Following the sounds he came to the Meanard kitchen, and there stood Pansy, by the side of the two big freezers of ice cream, the picture of woe.

"What's the trouble?" asked Seth. "Any bad news from home?"

"Bad news from Wildheath," said Pansy. "The worst kind of news. I'm a perfect idiot but so is that cook."

"Hush!" said Seth. "He's your adopted father for to-night. You mustn't speak that way of him. What has he done and what have you done?"

"It isn't what we've done," exclaimed Pansy, in deep disgust. "It's what we haven't done. I was

so busy looking after this ice cream that I never gave a thought to the cake. The cook says he thought I had it. There you are! Four elegant cakes! All left at the kitchen of the Palace!"

Seth laughed in riotous glee. Pansy's distress was ludicrous.

"Never mind," said Seth. "I'll go after them."

CHAPTER XIV

SCOTTY SEES HIS ENEMIES

"Scotty, would you be willing to leave this scene of gaiety and go back with me to the Palace?" asked Seth.

"I'd go with you any place you wanted," replied Scotty. "What's the matter?"

"Pansy forgot the cakes. There are four of 'em—big fellows—all packed and ready to bring. Pansy was thinking so much about the ice cream that he forgot 'em. The cook left it to Pansy. So there they are."

"These boys like cake," said Scotty. "Let's go after 'em."

"But we may miss the dinner," said Seth. "I'll get leave to take Doctor Pingree's car, but we'll be half an hour anyway; maybe an hour."

"I'll go with you," said Scotty.

"Good boy!" said Seth. "I could go alone, but two are better than one."

The improvement in the road made traveling

somewhat easier, and they made the trip to the Palace in good time, reaching there just about dusk. Mr. Ferguson, the bookkeeper of the sanitarium, had seen both boys before, and was quite willing to show them the kitchen and allow them to take the packages of cake.

The cakes were not packed to Seth's satisfaction. He did not believe they would ride well over the bumpy roads. While he and Mr. Ferguson were rearranging the packing, Scotty excused himself for a moment and stepped through the kitchen down into a hall.

Just a few seconds had passed when Seth heard a piercing shriek. Immediately following this came a cry for "Help!" unmistakably in Scotty's voice.

Seth and the bookkeeper rushed out to the hall. They did not see Scotty at first. Then Seth heard his voice, "Here! This way!"

A flight of steps led down to a basement passage. Standing before a closed door was Scotty.

"They went through this door," he exclaimed. "I was afraid to follow until you came."

"Don't pay too much attention to what he says," Seth warned Mr. Ferguson. "He's a little off in the upper story."

"That door leads into a storeroom," said Mr. Ferguson. "If anybody went in there we shall find them, for it has no other way out."

They hastened down the steps. Seth cautiously pushed open the door and Mr. Ferguson switched on an electric light which illuminated the room in every corner. It contained a lot of small boxes and some empty bottles. There was no human being in the room, and no place in which even a child might hide.

"They went in there!" declared Scotty. "They passed right in through this door. I came out in this hall to look for something that ought to be here, and just as I came out I saw them sneaking up these steps. I gave out a big scream before I knew what I was doing. They dodged back and through this door."

Seth gave a quiet wink at Mr. Ferguson.

"I suppose it was that doctor and Black Jack you saw, wasn't it?" he asked Scotty.

"Yes," replied Scotty. "How did you know?"

"I knew because you'd been thinking of them and talking of them already this evening, and you've been rather excited."

"You don't believe me!" said Scotty. "You think I didn't see them."

"Now, let's not talk about it any more," said Seth. "Let's forget it and hurry back to the party."

"I guess you wouldn't believe me if I told you that I came out into this hall to look for my safe—the safe deposit vault that was built—"

"Let's forget it," said Seth. "Look here, Scotty; do you like me?"

"You know I do," replied Scotty.

"Then, for my sake, don't say another word. For Mr. Eastcome's sake, don't say another word. You know how easily these people in the sanitarium take the alarm. I wouldn't have them hear anything about this for anything. Won't you try to forget it?"

"I'd do anything for you and Mr. Eastcome," said Scotty. "I'm all right and what I saw is all true, but if you want me to forget it, that's what I'll do. I never was much good to anybody before, and you and Mr. Eastcome are the first people ever did treat me as good as a pet dog gets treated. I'll do anything you say."

"Then help me to get these cakes into the car and we'll get going. They'll be ready for the ice-cream course before we get back, if we don't hurry."

Scotty loaded himself up without another word and disappeared in the direction of the car. Seth followed, and in a few minutes they were again on the road to the Scout and Father celebration. When they reached the farm they needed no one to tell them that the dinner had been a success and was, already, a thing of the past. Some still lingered at the table, but most of them were gathering around a group that was organizing a tug of war along one side of the hall.

"It's Wildcats agen Round Tables!" they heard young Lije shout, as he gave one of his characteristic leaps. "Wildcats agen Round Tables! Whoop-ee!"

Seth and Scotty eagerly threw themselves into the fray on the Round Table end, but in this sport the Wildcats had all the advantage. Perhaps the boys might have matched the Wildcat boys, but the men of the party were also included, and those of the Round Table group had none of the bone and sinew of the hill men. It was but a few minutes before the Round Table side was pulled over the line, amid general merriment, and they came with great good fellowship. Mr. Eastcome knew that both sides won a victory in this contest, for it left a strong, friendly feeling. The Wild-

cat men could afford to throw off their stiffness, now they had shown these "city fellows" their superiority.

In a First Aid exhibition that followed, Round Table Patrol won easily. The boys were required to go out in the dark, carrying no implements but scout axes and knives. They were to improvise a litter, at some place not less than one hundred yards from the house, improvise proper bandages for a broken thigh, and bring their patient to the hospital (the kitchen) in good order.

It was old work for Seth and Shadow, who had given such a demonstration many times in years gone by. They prepared stout branches for litter poles, turned their coats inside out for a litter bed, bandaged Charlie Baxter from armpit to ankle, and had him back to the hospital, in good condition, within six minutes. These hill men, every one of whom had faced such an emergency at some time, knew how to appreciate this work. They examined the litter to test its carrying powers and durability, they looked critically at the bandages; they felt of the padded splint that ran down the body.

"It's the stuff our younkers need," pronounced the father of Jared Fleming. "It's zackly what

they got to know. My boy Jared; he's goin' to learn it. He's goin' to learn it proper."

"My Lije, he's learning of it right now," said big Elijah Bainscot. "He thinks he's putty good an' some day he will be. Jest now he's 'bout a mile back; but taggin' along, though. He'll be yere putty quick now."

He was right. Young Lije and his party were the first of the Wildcats to report. They had done fairly well, but it was easily apparent that their patient would have suffered materially had it been necessary to make the trip with a genuine fracture.

"Lije is awfully good at tying knots, though," asserted Charlie Baxter. "He's going to show us how, next thing on the program. That sheep-shank he does is the prettiest thing you want to see, and as quick as tying a granny."

He was right. Knot tying was ancient history with these men, coming down, perhaps, from some remote ancestry which had served on the seas before penetrating deep into these mountain recesses in their search for liberty. Young Lije had not known all of the knots when first initiated, but he had been an apt pupil. His cleverness at this exhibition brought forth hearty applause from the visitors from the Palace, and although the men of

the hills would not lay aside their reserve to the extent of clapping hands or such other manifestation of weakness, they spoke heartily to one another and grinned broadly their approval.

Perhaps the enthusiasm would have been dulled after that, but Shadow happily introduced his "scout father" from St. Louis, the professional entertainer. A man of great wit and a skilled performer of many feats, this gentleman held the crowd spellbound. Many of those in his audience had never been out of the hills. They had not even seen the cheap vaudeville of the small towns. Scarcely could they believe it possible that mortal man could perform these wonders.

These natives never would have gone to the Palace to see these things; they had always disdained any connection with "them crazy folk at that there Palace." They had come here to-night with no thought of softening their ideas, but solely because their own boys had begged them to come. It was to be a notable evening in the lives of many of them, an evening such as would stand out bright and clear above the dull gray of their constant routine. Mr. Eastcome was sure that it was destined to go far in solving the problem of changing the evil reputation "the Palace" had acquired, and

putting him and his people on friendly terms with those upon whom they were so dependent as neighbors.

The entertainer closed his evening with their official State Song. He was a wily man. He realized that no matter how popular and well-known this music might be in Little Rock and other centers of population, there was a strong probability that many of these people did not even know that they possessed a state song.

So he lined it out very carefully and emphatically, and then urged them to join:

I am thinking to-night of the Southland,
Of the home of my childhood days,
Where I roamed through the woods and the meadows,
By the mill and the brook that plays;
Where the roses are in bloom,
And the sweet magnolia too,
Where the jasmine is white, and the fields are violet blue
There a welcome awaits all her children
Who have wandered afar from home.

Chorus:
Arkansas, Arkansas, 'tis a name dear,
'Tis the place I call "Home, Sweet Home,"

Arkansas, Arkansas, I salute thee,
From thy shelter no more I'll roam.

There were many moist eyes as the singing ended, for they were an emotional people of strong loyalty to their hills and fields. They affected a deep reserve, but once it was uncovered a big vein of sentiment lay bare.

The strain was relieved by a very prosaic announcement made by young Lije the Patrol Leader of the Wildcats.

"Ice cream!" he called. "Ice cream and cake! More stuff than all of us can put away. Me an' my dad, an' my brother Job is goin' out a piece around yere, an' we is aimin' to give a invite to all them folks as isn't in this party but's been lookin' on. They's nuff boys out thar to make a Mountain Lion Patrol. All you folkses come up an' git served right sudden, cause this ice cream an' cake is like to melt pow'ful rapid when these Mountain Lions git to goin'! They don't git ice cream every day. Some of 'em don't git it wunst a year. Some of 'em never hardly gits it. Wunst they git started this yere party's all over."

"But that's exactly the way to end it," said Mr. Eastcome to Seth. "We've had the Wildcat Scouts

and their fathers and a lot of their mothers, all the evening, and they've had a jolly lark. Splendid! Now if there are prospective scouts, watching from that fringe of woods, Mountain Lions or whatever they be, let them come in and get a taste of the good things we can bring!"

CHAPTER XV

BLACK JACK WARNS THEM AWAY

The Wildcat Patrol fellows were anxious to get their uniforms, but full equipment would cost each scout several dollars and money was very scarce in that country at that season of the year.

They appealed to the scoutmaster, Doctor Pingree, to help them devise plans for earning money.

"Why not apply to Mr. Eastcome," he suggested.

"You don't reckon he'd hire us, does ye?" asked Elijah Bainscot, their patrol leader. "Ain't he hiring folks f'm the north jest to keep us hill people out?"

"Not at all," said Doctor Pingree. "You are wrong in your suspicions. You were suspicious of me and you found you were wrong in that. Now I must tell you that you are wrong about Mr. Eastcome. He told me yesterday that he would like to engage some more help so that the boys he has could do other work."

"We would be willing to work for him if that Scout Seth was our boss," said Elijah.

"Seth probably would be," said Doctor Pingree. "But you must go to Mr. Eastcome to ask for work."

So the next day eight hill boys, headed by Charlie Baxter, came to see Mr. Eastcome and ask for work.

"Can we use them, Seth?" asked Mr. Eastcome.

"Yes, sir," said Seth. "Our strawberry crop will be ready to pick in a week or two. Meantime we can use these boys in transplanting a lot of young peach trees that need thinning out. They could help out as guards, too, sometimes. That job gets awfully monotonous, and our boys would rather do other work."

"Well, you put them to work," said Mr. Eastcome. "I suppose they'll work on 'scout honor'?"

"Good scouts are always on scout honor, Mr. Eastcome," said Seth. "Everything they do is on that basis."

Seth was very glad to get more help, for he needed Ping, Pansy, and Shadow to help him get ready for the strawberry crop. There were several truck loads of berry boxes and crates that must be hauled from the station as soon as they

arrived. However, there was much delay in shipment of these materials. Seth was worried about the probability of their failing to reach them in time.

While they were waiting a telegram came to Mr. Eastcome announcing that the motor boat he had ordered was now ready for delivery. It would be at Little Rock.

Mr. Eastcome and Seth went to the city by train and there found a beautiful little motor boat. In spite of its smallness it was capable of great utility, for it had a substantial upper deck for freight as well as considerable storage room below.

"The boat will carry without any trouble all you want to ship," said the dealer, "and if you wish, you can hook on a string of flatboats and she will pull as many as you can steer.

As a preliminary test, Seth managed to get her deck loaded with some strawberry boxes and crates which he found an opportunity to buy in Little Rock.

"Here's the first use for the motor boat," he announced to Mr. Eastcome. "We should have lost our berries if we had waited for those boxes to come by freight from St. Louis. Now we can run home with these in one day."

Seth was already familiar with several makes of motor boats and easily picked up the special points of the new model. In two hours the dealer was satisfied to turn the boat over to him. Late that evening, after a successful trip up the river, Seth and Mr. Eastcome brought their boat up alongside Black Jack's little dock.

"See what a dandy place this is for a dock," Seth pointed out. "It is protected on every side but the south and our boat could ride here in safety in the most severe storm that ever comes along the river."

"I hope we can see Black Jack and get his terms for dockage," said Mr. Eastcome.

Black Jack might have heard the remark, for he appeared almost instantly, shouting:

"Take that chugging thing away f'm my dock! Get away f'm this island. Who are you to come here killin' all the fish and drivin' the rest of em' away?"

"Why, my good fellow," replied Mr. Eastcome, "we are not killing any fish. We are willing to pay for what we want. You have such a splendid harbor here, don't you know. We just want the opportunity to run our motor boat in here when not in use and we promise not to interfere with"—

"No, you won't interfere," shouted Black Jack, "I know you and the man who was here afore ye. Yore all o' the same stripe. You get that pretty new boat o' yourn out o' here in five minutes or I'll begin fillin' up her works with rifle bullets, an' I warn ye they ain't any better shot around these here parts."

"But we will pay you"—began Mr. Eastcome.

"You can't pay me. You ain't got enough money to pay me—you and your dirty gas engine that's spoiling all the sport in the river. You get out o' here right sudden. I'm a countin' them minutes, now, an' five is all yore agoin' to git."

It did not take Seth five minutes to get his new boat out of the harbor of Black Jack's Island. He selected a spot with some natural advantages on the river bank, near the ranch house, and, before the declining sun left them in utter darkness, he had managed, by the use of every available helper in the place, to construct a rude dock alongside of which the boat could be left in safety.

Charlie Baxter, dressed in his scout uniform which had just arrived, came to the ranch house the next morning to offer most abject apologies.

"I just don't know what to make of him," he declared. "He knows that your motor won't

really have any effect on his fishing. It isn't that. I don't understand him. Everybody else is coming along fine. All the people from the hills are so friendly. And here he has to be stubborn in spite of all I can say to him. I feel almost as if maybe I ought to resign and not be a scout any longer since I'm such a poor one that I can't even influence the man I live with."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Eastcome. "I know you've done a lot for us. You got the Wildcat Patrol of Scouts going. That's the thing that's been our salvation, making friends of the hill people. I have all the pickers I need for my berry crop, which is something I never had before. We don't find any more young trees damaged. No mysterious shots have been fired lately. No one has seen any gorillas. And why? Because your hill boys are learning how to be real scouts, and you are the one who is teaching them."

"Then you don't think I need turn in my badge?" asked Charlie.

"I do not, old chum," said Mr. Eastcome. "They tell me that you've made yourself ready to be a first-class scout already, and you haven't been a member two months yet. I'll tell them that you were a first-class scout before ever they saw you.

You needed a chance and Ozark Troop gave it to you."

"It's done a lot for Scotty, too," said Seth, as the two walked away together on their morning rounds. "He's just about a new boy. He hasn't had one of his foolish fancies for over a month. I think he's forgetting about them. It surely helps him a lot. He knows that 'a scout is brave,' and he's found the place where the scout gets his courage, too."

"Yes, Scotty is fine, too," said Mr. Eastcome. "I feel more like giving three rousing cheers for this old place than I have any time in the three years I've been connected with it. It is a great relief to feel that the natives, the hill people, are beginning to understand that I mean everything well. That big, lean chap, Elijah, the one who goes around with a gun so much of the time, actually asked after my health when I met him the day before yesterday."

"That's Elijah Bainscot. His son, the chap with the same name, is patrol leader of Wildcat Patrol and he surely is a wildcat scout. The father and mother are both very grateful. Young Lije was beginning to run with the moonshiners and drink a lot of their stuff. Scouting saved him from it. They'd do anything for you now."

"The best thing they can do for me now is to come and pick berries," said Mr. Eastcome. "If we get this berry crop to the city this week we shall be among the first on the market."

"I figure we shall run our first load the day after to-morrow," said Seth. "Taking them to market by motor boat means we'll have to run at night so as to be there for the early morning market, but we can do it. One thing you mustn't forget to do, and that is to send a telegram to Dorsey Brothers telling them to be expecting us and to have a truck there."

Fortunately the weather was fine, for the night trip would not be so simple a matter as running the boat in broad daylight. There was comparatively little boat traffic on the Arkansas River above Little Rock, but there were many dangers to be encountered in navigation—drifts to be avoided, sand bars to be watched for, and a keen outlook ahead to be kept at all times. Besides, they must get used to the whims of the new boat.

This first trip would be of the utmost importance, for upon its success would depend the whole prospect of Wildheath Fruit Ranch in carrying its products to a successful market. Financially it would mean the difference between failure and suc-

cess to Mr. Eastcome, and therefore to Seth and his young aides.

As a reward for their faithful work, Seth had chosen the Bushville scouts, Ping, Pansy, and Shadow, to be his assistants on this first momentous trip, and they awaited the adventure with impatience.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SUCCESS OF THE MOTOR BOAT

At last the day for putting the new motor-boat scheme in operation arrived. The boat was loaded with its first cargo of strawberries for the Little Rock market.

The scouts of Round Table Patrol vied with the members of the Wildcat Patrol for first honors. But since the scouts of the hills were able to bring so many of their kinsmen to help them, the Round Table boys were soon obliged to yield to them the honors of the field, and content themselves with checking, packing, and loading the crates. By sundown the boat was filled to its greatest capacity with the finest fruit that Wildheath Ranch had produced in many seasons.

Mr. Eastcome was highly elated. As Seth very well knew, it was not that financial success meant so much to him. The Eastcome fortune was such that the success or failure of one fruit crop would scarcely affect the balance in any way. But the good-hearted Englishman had become entranced

with the attractive section in which he owned so many valuable acres. He desired to live in it, to become a citizen, to cultivate not only its soil but the friendship of its native people. He was a man of genial heart and wanted to be on terms of good will with every one around him. It hurt him to think that the people among whom he had chosen to live should be so suspicious of him. So it was indeed a welcome sight to him to see the hill people working on his place and gathering his crop with such hearty good will.

When the boat was loaded and the crowd had fully admired the boat and its freight, he invited all of the workers to come to the ranch house. Helpers from the Palace had been there all afternoon and had prepared a genuine feast. Delicacies that were scarcely known even by name to these people of the hills were provided in abundance, and there was no lack of the substantial food needed by those who had labored hard from the rising to the setting of the sun. To avoid any embarrassment the meal was served on the grass plot in front of the buildings, and thus the crowd was free to go and come as it pleased.

Mr. Eastcome was so happy that he just had to talk.

"I am from England, you know," he said. "It is a dear old land, but it has nothing in all its comfortable borders like the wild beauty that every hill and cliff and rushing river of your gorgeous scenery can show. I never supposed I should come here and learn to love an alien land better than my own. But I was drawn here by matters connected with the estate, and now I want to stay. There's just one thing that troubles me—I can't push myself in where I'm not welcome. I can't enjoy living in an atmosphere of suspicion. So I scarcely can say how glad I am to see so many of you as guests at my table to-day. I think it has all come about through my Boy Scouts of Round Table Patrol and your Boy Scouts of Wildcat Patrol.

"Now I thought I would name that pretty little motor boat 'Round Table,' in honor of the patrol. But as I have seen these scouts of the hills work so loyally to-day, it seems that I should give them recognition, too. Shall I call the boat the 'Round Table' or shall I call it the 'Wildcat'?"

"How would it do," asked Shadow, "to split the names up and call it part of one and part of the other?"

"I fear the result would not be happy," laughed Mr. Eastcome. "Would you like better to call it

'Wild Table,' or would you prefer 'Round Cat'?"

The boys of both patrols roared with laughter and Shadow subsided in confusion.

Big Elijah Bainscot, who was a leader among the hill people, now rose from where he had been sitting on the grass and slowly pulled himself to his great height.

"Neighbor, I'm glad to welcome ye," he said. "I never reckoned as I'd have any welcome fer a Britisher, least of all an Eastcome. But yore pow'ful diffunt f'm that there uncle o' your'n, an' I reckon he warn't really no blood kin. Now, neighbor, my boy Lije is a Wildcat Scout an' proud of it, but he says to me as how both Wildcats an' Roun' Tables is all Ozark Troopers. So, neighbor, we-all say to you, call yore boat a name as we-all love an' we-all is proud to give to you to use. Name her 'The Ozark.'"

Big Lije again settled back on the grass, folding himself up like a great jackknife amid uproarious applause, scarcely realizing that his speech of good will was the one thing needed to make Mr. Eastcome's happiness complete. That very evening the boat's name was painted on its side, and when the boys started on their night trip, with Mr. Jillson, the engineer at the Palace, accompanying them for

greater safety, it was upon the decks of the *Ozark* that they proudly trod.

Seth was captain. Ping, Shadow, and Pansy were both crew and deckhands, and Mr. Jillson was engineer. It was nine o'clock when they started. They made the trip without mishap of any kind. They passed under the Main Street bridge at Little Rock and docked just at daybreak.

The strawberries were the first large consignment that had appeared, and brought an excellent price. They were all taken by the customers of Dorsey Brothers, the whole consignment being disposed of before seven o'clock in the morning. Ordinarily Seth would have given the boys permission to spend at least half the day sight-seeing before returning, but affairs at the ranch were now so urgent that he arranged to return at once.

They were almost ready to cast loose when a well-dressed man of suave manner stepped from the dock to the boat, asking who was in charge. He was referred to Seth.

"I hear that you are making a trip up the river," he said. "I wonder if you go anywhere near Greenripe?"

"We pass right by it," said Seth. "Our place is just a few miles farther along."

"I'm very anxious to get there to-day," said the stranger. "Could you take a passenger? I'd gladly pay you five dollars for the trouble."

Seth reflected upon what five dollars would do in equipment for one of the new patrols, and yielded.

"We can't give you much but a seat," he said. "This boat isn't exactly a passenger liner. But if you don't mind the litter, and are ready to start at once, we'll take you."

"I'm ready now," said the stranger. "All I carry is this bag."

"You're just in time, then," said Seth. "We're pulling out right now. We have to clean up as we go, so please find the best place you can."

The stranger found a seat in the stern, where he was pretty well out of the way, and fell to reading his morning paper just as he might have done on a passenger boat. The journey was about half done when he found Seth again, most of the cleaning up of the boat having been accomplished.

"Have you a good engineer who thoroughly understands motor boats?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed," said Seth. "He holds a pilot's license, too."

"Would you mind if I stepped over to his engine and watched him and perhaps asked a few ques-

tions?" said the stranger. "I'm thinking of buying a small boat of this type and I'd be very glad to learn a few things."

"I don't know that Mr. Jillson would object," replied Seth. "You'll have to ask him."

He saw the man step up to the partly inclosed space that shielded the engine, and thought no more of the visitor until Greenripe came in sight and reminded him that his passenger must land. Then he found that he was still cooped up with Mr. Jillson, examining parts of the engine.

"We're nearing Greenripe," Seth announced.

"Well, I've had a most delightful trip," said the stranger. "And I've learned a lot."

He shook hands with all of them as he left the boat at the Greenripe landing, and stood there waving to them as they pulled out into the river.

"What did you think of him, Mr. Jillson?" asked Seth.

"Didn't like him, but couldn't get rid of him," said Jillson. "He wanted to know everything. He's smooth, that fellow is. If he was an engine he could run without oil, he's so slick."

"He seemed so to me," said Seth. "Say, now I know who he is! As I see him in the distance I remember him because the only other time I saw him

was at a distance. He's the fellow who tried to beat up old Scotty. The more I look at him, the surer I am. I've a notion to go back and get him."

"Don't try it," said Jillson. "You haven't enough proof."

"No, I reckon not. But I'm sure of it, just the same."

All the way to their dock Seth thought the matter over, and the minute he could get away he rushed up to find Scotty and put him on his guard.

"I'll watch for him," said Scotty. "I'm not nearly so afraid now, though."

It was a busy day for every one. Strawberries ripen fast when once they begin, and they cannot be picked if overripe. No one was able to pay much attention to vague threats or to worry over the possibility that an enemy might be around. Seth had promised Dorsey Brothers that in two days he would be back with another and still better load of berries.

Every one was tired when night came. It had been a long time since guard had been kept at night, but Seth did not feel satisfied to neglect the precaution at this time, so it was arranged that Scotty and Charlie Baxter, who had not suffered the strain of the river trip, should stand guard, turn about.

"You're sure you aren't afraid, Scotty?" asked Seth.

"Sure," affirmed Scotty. "I'd like to see him come."

CHAPTER XVII

SCOTTY GOES ON GUARD DUTY

Scotty understood his duties as guard quite thoroughly and had no fear in undertaking them. He had done guard duty often enough to get used to it and several times had done it alone.

It was nine o'clock when Scotty went on duty. The night was quite dark, but he knew that moonlight was scheduled and that it would be fairly light by midnight. He was to watch the *Ozark,* as she lay moored to the ranch dock in the river, but his special attention would be given to the ranch house, to the strawberry patches, and to the Palace. It was no trifling job that faced him, and he felt rather a proud responsibility to think that he, Scotty, the waif, should be given such an important trust. At one o'clock he was to call Charlie. Up to that hour the fortunes of Ranch, Palace and motor boat were all under his protection. Scotty thrilled proudly at the realization of this honorable trust. It was proof that he had made good; that he was no longer considered a poor, shiftless nobody.

Fortunately the weather was mild and comfortable. It was a real pleasure to breathe the mild, night air; to inhale the pleasant scents that were wafted over from the gardens; to listen to the soft noises of the river. Scotty walked quietly from spot to spot with his mind on many things.

There were two people in the world who meant more to Scotty than all others put together, and for whose approval and even commendation he would brave anything. These two were Mr. Eastcome and Seth Payson.

He had always admired Mr. Eastcome. The pleasant, open face of the English owner had won him, even in the days when he had been practically a prisoner in the sanitarium. In those days he had seen Mr. Eastcome once or twice and had even thought of calling himself to his attention and appealing for help. He had never reached this point and finally had made his escape unaided. After a year of hazardous wandering, a chance glimpse of Mr. Eastcome had caused him to throw himself in his way and beg for transportation. He had in this a vague idea of getting back to the place where certain valuables belonging to him were locked up in the strong box to which he alone held the combination. But even stronger than the desire to get to

his treasure was the wish to be under Mr. Eastcome's protection.

As to Seth Payson—that glorious young athlete was to Scotty the very ideal of true manhood. He could think of no grander ambition than that of growing up to such courage, self-reliance, and manly purpose as were manifested by Seth. He cherished every word of approbation that fell from the lips of his mentor; and was beginning to hope that the time would soon come when he could prove that he was not a poor creature preyed upon by all manner of hallucinations, but one in sound mind who had a reason for his suspicions.

As the days had gone by, Scotty, under Seth's watchful care, had built up in physique; his wasted muscles were filling out; his sunken cheeks were rounding into shape; the tired, hunted look was disappearing from his eyes; so had his mental capacity increased. He could now think much more clearly of his early experiences, and could reason them out in connected fashion to his own much greater satisfaction.

He remembered very well his earliest experiences at the sanitarium. He remembered when "the doctor" began to be cruel, even to the extent of beating him. He remembered, quite distinctly, the building

of the strong box. It was with the thought of locating this strong box, and seeing if it would yield to the combination that he still carried that Scotty had left Seth in the kitchen, on the evening when they had gone to the Palace to get the cakes for the Scout and Father banquet.

Perhaps if he had been left to himself at that time he would have succeeded in finding the safe and also in opening it. It had happened, however, that the door of that basement room had opened, and who should come creeping up but "the doctor" and Black Jack. At Scotty's scream they had disappeared. They had vanished so completely that Seth would give no credit to his story. It seemed utterly absurd to say that two big men had disappeared in that closed room. Nevertheless Scotty was quite sure of himself.

"They did go in that door, and they must have got out of that room by some secret way," Scotty told himself, as he thought it over. "I'm not through yet. I'm going to make Seth believe me, and we'll find that safe deposit vault and see if my combination will open it. And we'll explore that room and see if there ain't some other way out. There sure must be."

Scotty was waking up to a great many things in

these days of returning physical and mental health. He had begun to realize that these boys of Round Table Patrol owned many things that made them superior to him. They had fathers and mothers and families to whom they wrote letters and of whom they frequently spoke. They had both knowledge and education. They used better language than he. They had different and much greater ambitions.

Would it be possible for his own horizon to be enlarged? He could learn to use better language; he could be as ambitious as any of them. Perhaps he could not aspire to any family connections, but he might, at least, get these material things. And they would come much more readily if the papers and things stored in that strong box really did show him to be possessed of wealth.

He was pretty sure of this wealth himself. But never before had he felt that it really did belong to him and to nobody else and that a little determination would bring it within his grasp. The thought had been growing very strong, of late. Just as soon as these berries were shipped, and things had quieted down a little, he was going to Seth, or perhaps to Mr. Eastcome, or perhaps to both; and he would prove to them that a safe deposit vault—a strong box—really did exist. He would show them the

strip of linen cloth bearing the figures of the combination; the very strip that had been handed to him on the day that the strong box had been finished.

He remembered that day much more distinctly now. In his vagabond days when he had been cold, and wet, and scared, and hungry, his vision of those experiences had become very hazy; almost like a dream. But now that he was so much stronger and more vigorous the picture stood out very distinctly.

The strong box had been finished. The doctor, of dreaded memory, had made a great showing of putting upon its shelves a lot of papers done up in packages and also a heavy box of valuables. Scotty himself had put in a few simple treasures. The mechanic had closed the heavy doors and made an adjustment of the lock. Then he had written down the numbers of the combination and handed them to "the doctor." And the doctor had given the strip to Scotty.

It was surprising how such a frail, scared body as Scotty could have summoned courage to bolt; but that was exactly what the boy did, with that precious combination in his possession. He could picture it all now. He could even imagine the rage of "the doctor" on finding his victim flown.

And then had come the year of wretched wanderings as a vagabond, ending at last in the casual meeting with Mr. Eastcome and the refuge with him and Seth. Well, Seth would believe him when he saw that strong box opened, and when he saw that it really did make him rich. He would give Seth just as much of this wealth as he would take. It was impossible to do too much for Seth. And, perhaps, in return, Seth would let him come and live with him, and never be hungry, or cold, or afraid any more; never again be a homeless waif. That would be as great joy as Scotty's imagination could compass.

It was with these thoughts that Scotty's mind was filled as he kept his watch that pleasant evening, walking from house to ranch, and from ranch to dock. The club that he carried was of stout, seasoned wood. It would be as effective as a sword in the hands of an energetic watchman. Almost he longed for a subject upon which he might try its efficiency. And even as the longing dawned upon his mind he saw in the faintly increasing moonlight an animal form, coming up from the direction of the dock and slipping over to the gardens.

It was not so large as the black shape that he had seen a few weeks earlier; the time when he and

Seth had chased the alleged gorilla. But it moved just as quietly and just as quickly.

Scotty was after it in a moment, not waiting to call for aid. It dashed into some bushes and then scurried along through a mass of brush, still with very little noise. Evidently the strange animal sensed the pursuit, but without any appreciable quickening of pace it managed to retain a good lead. Before Scotty realized what was happening he had been drawn far from his patrol. And still the animal kept so far away that he could not even identify its species.

Scotty came to a realization of his position suddenly. Here he was, a mile from his post, chasing an indistinguishable animal that could do no great harm at its worst. And meantime the ranch house and grounds, the Palace, and the precious motor boat were without protection. He turned to retrace his footsteps. And then he discovered that he did not know in what direction he had been traveling. The woods were around him, dark, and forbidding, on every side. He was lost!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DOCTOR GETS THE COMBINATION

Strangely enough Scotty was not so terrified at his predicament as many better balanced boys might have been. He had been a scared, fearful, shrinking creature. But he had had no fear of the dark, no fear of the woods, no fear of its creatures. His fear had all been of the cruelties of brutal man and unsympathetic, jeering human beings.

Why should he be afraid of the dark? To him darkness had been a kindly element. It hid his imperfections. When he could shrink away from his human tormentors and hide himself under its cover he was relatively happy. He was not afraid of the woods, for it had been his habit to seek their solitude whenever he could. He was not afraid of the creatures of the woods, for they had always been his friends. As a matter of fact, although he realized that he was lost, he saw in it no occasion for terror, and kept his self-possession; and this very thing was the greatest help that could have come to his assistance in finding his way back.

In his year of vagabond wanderings up and down the country Scotty had found two marks that were reliable guides to civilization. He knew that a road generally led to the haunts of men, and it was his experience that the same was true of a river. He remembered that the evening breeze had blown from the vines, carrying their scents to him and on towards the river. So, as he felt the wind finding its way across an open space he accepted it as his guide to the river and started off in the direction indicated.

Stumbling in this uncertain fashion he did at last come to a crumbling river bank and far below him could hear the swift rush of a rather treacherous current. He kept well away from the edge of the bank and started to beat his way up to the place where the Ozark should be moored. Climbing through brush and weeds he found it a hard journey, but at last he won through. The moonlight was now clear enough to let him plainly see the little motor boat riding in apparent peace and safety at her dock, and he could also see, not very far distant, the buildings of the ranch, while in the background loomed the majestic bulk of the Palace.

Everything was quiet. Gratefully Scotty threw himself down on the river bank, that he might give

his exhausted muscles a few minutes' rest after the hard strain, and ponder upon what manner of animal it could have been that led him into the wilderness. And it is not very surprising, under the circumstances, that he fell asleep.

Scotty had slept on the hard earth, with the stars for a ceiling, many a night, so it would have been no surprising thing had his sleep lasted all the night through. But he was a faithful scout. His duties were a very real obligation to him. So although sleep was wrapping around him its most enchanting blanket of drowsiness his scout duty refused to let him yield entirely. In troubled dreams he was still going through the motions of being on guard.

Voices were in the air. They were close to him. They were saying interesting things about the ranch. They were talking about him, too.

"Where's that boy, Jack? I haven't seen him for nearly an hour. That was an awfully clumsy trick of yours to let that animal get away so soon. I didn't want it let go until the boy got down this way, so he would come down to find out what it was and give us a chance to get hold of him."

"No good now, Doc," a rough voice replied. "Go get another one."

"You know that's the last. It's gone off in the woods and not much chance we'll ever see it again. Probably scared that boy so he has shut himself up in the house."

"Can't help it, Doc. I done the best I could. I ain't wantin' to kidnap no boy, nowadays. You c'n get into that safe without him."

"Maybe I can but it will be a tough job. That safe has never been opened since the day it was finished, and I loaded it up with all the stocks, bonds, monies and securities of his estate and made that terrible grand-stand play of giving the combination over to him, without even looking at it. I figured I'd get it as soon as the workmen were gone. It wasn't his business, anyway. It was mine, because I was his legal guardian. I am yet, for that matter. And to think that little half-wit should take that very minute to get clear away from me! I never have known how he did it. He's got that combination right now. It's a simple matter for us, when once we've got him, to get the combination and open the safe."

"Tain't so simple to get him, though. Why don't ye go along in broad day and tell them Palace people that ye got to be allowed to bust yore way into that safe. If it was you built it, an' you put

the stuff in it; an' you air' guardeen to the boy, why hain't ye got a right to it?"

"That's a foolish question, Jack. You know why I had to leave Wildheath Sanitarium. You don't need me to remind you that I had to go while the going was good. That man Summers finally died, and I guess his people would get out a warrant for me pretty quick if they knew where to serve it. It's no good being foolish, Jack. There's just one thing for us to do, and that is to get the boy and make him give up that combination. Then I can open the safe in five minutes. Half of the stuff is yours, Jack. There'll be a lot that we can't turn into money, but there's enough good, easy stuff to make a nice pile for each of us. And we must get that boy to-night, if we can."

Scotty was wide enough awake by now. The voice that had been saying these terrible things was a voice that he had heard in nightmare many a time. Now that he heard it in reality it awakened him very effectively. The speakers were close, very close. He dared not move a muscle, but the sounds of the voice told him that they were at the little dock, not twenty feet away from where he lay.

"I reckon I'd better work my way up along to the

house," said Jack. "If the boy sees me, I can tell him some fool story an' mebbe I can git him to come down this way."

"That's it, Jack. Lure him down this way. Let me get my hands on that boy just once and I don't ask anything else."

"I dunno, Doc. They ain't got to be no more o' that Summers business."

"Don't worry. Here's what we do. Get him in your boat, take him over to the island, get him in the cave. Then I get the combination. Then we use the tunnel to get over to the Palace; same way we went that time when the boy saw us. It will be after midnight and every one in bed. I'll clean out the safe and we'll get back along the tunnel to the island. Then you will take us down the river. I'm not going to hurt the boy. I'm still his legal guardian and there are papers I can get him to sign."

"That's all right, Doc. But how 'bout this yere motor boat—this *Ozark* thing. They'll miss this boy an' they'll start down river in this motor boat and catch up with us, and what then?"

"Oh, we'll smash the thing and let it drift down on to the island," said the doctor.

Scotty drew in his breath with a sudden quiver.

Smash the motor boat, would they? Smash the *Ozark?* Smash the boat that was the pride of Round Table Patrol; the boat that he was supposed to be guarding? The blood chased madly through his pulses as his indignation boiled within him. He had been a poor, scared thing when he came to Wildheath. He was still far from being a bold adventurer. But he had learned some things; and he had gained some courage; and he did not propose that these villains should carry out their program unhindered. The worst they could do would be to kill him. He had been near to death many times, and he resolved that this time there should be at least something done from his side.

He must not act foolishly, though. He was a sentinel rather than a guard. His instructions were that if anything suspicious occurred he was to call Seth. He must not allow himself to run into danger. He had been foolish to follow that animal away from his post and by so doing he had run into unforeseen danger, very grave danger. The important thing now was to get out of it as expeditiously as possible and reach the place where he could secure help.

In this desperate situation, as tight a corner as any scout would care to be in, Scotty felt the need

of real training in scouting. He knew that it would be the height of folly to get up and run. He would be a prominent figure in the moonlight, and though he had a few feet the start, and might beat his pursuers in a fair race, there was little chance that any fairness would be shown. He would scarcely get started before Black Jack or "the doctor" would take a shot at him.

In some scouting games they had played with Wildcat Patrol Scotty had seen Seth cover a hundred yards of just such territory, without detection by any of the opposing patrol. He tried to think just how Seth had made progress. He must do the same. He must creep and squirm and twist his way along, and do it all so noiselessly as to get along without attracting attention. If he could put a hundred yards between himself and these scoundrels he might venture to rise and run for it, taking his chances at that distance.

Poor Scotty! He had gained little by his observation of Seth or he would have known better than to begin his efforts while still wearing his heavy boots, and a belt with a metal buckle. He was scarcely started before he heard his buckle clash with a hidden stone. He stopped and listened anxiously. Hearing no sound of pursuit he started

again, still more cautiously. There was some comfort in the fact that his face was almost hidden in the earth. At least he saw no pursuers. But it was the comfort of the ostrich with his head in the sand.

If the doctor had been the only one to hear that buckle strike, he would have passed it by; but the other listener, Black Jack, was a woodsman of life-long experience. That sound meant something to him; beyond a doubt. He did not start out in wild pursuit. Had he done so, Scotty might have had some chance to escape. But he stood listening until his trained ear heard another sound and his keen eyes detected motion that was not due to the light breeze of night.

Black Jack was on the trail in a moment. Quietly he moved, far more quietly than his prey; so quietly indeed that he was almost within reaching distance before Scotty realized that he was being followed.

The boy was almost paralyzed with fear. He had been bold a few minutes ago, and he would be bold again; but just for the moment he could not even bring his vocal cords into action to make a sound. In that moment Black Jack flung himself upon him, muffling his head and shoulders with the old coat that he had torn from his own back.

Kick, squirm, strike, struggle as he would, Scotty was utterly powerless in the muscular arms of the woodsman; but he was still putting up such fight as lay within him when the "doctor" came up.

"This is the kid you want, ain't it?" asked Jack.

"The very one!" replied the doctor, in triumph. "He fell right into our hands."

"Not accordin' to my notion," objected Black Jack. "I've an idee as how I trailed this here kid an' got him afore he had no chanct to git away. Now ef you want him, tie his legs some way."

"We'll take him to the boat and get him over to the island," suggested the doctor. "Are you sure he can't holler?"

"Not so as to hurt nobody, he cain't. I reckon they's a rope in the boat. When I git a few turns o' that around him he's agoin' to quit squirming."

Scotty realized that further resistance was futile, once he felt the rope encircling his body. There would be nothing gained by upsetting the boat. He became quiet and lay very still as Black Jack pulled over to the island.

"Now, kid," said Black Jack, "I'm a goin' to take this thing off'n yore head an' loose yore feet. Hollerin' won't git ye nothin' but a tap over the head with a club; so don't try nary holler. I'm right here

an' doc's right here; so yore best plan is to move along quiet an' do as yore told. Step out now."

Scotty started in the direction of Black Jack's cottage.

"Not that way," ordered Black Jack. "Right down here by the river is where we all go. See them bushes. Step out!"

What were they going to do with him? thought Scotty. Just put him out of the way? But he knew they would not do that until they had taken away from him the much desired combination to the safe-deposit vault.

Arrived at the bushes Black Jack attempted to throw the old coat over his head again.

"Why waste time doing that?" asked the doctor.

"Might save trouble," replied Black Jack. "Don't want him to see nothin', then he won't know nothin'."

"Just as you please," agreed the doctor. "But he'll never come to this cave, again. Not if I know it."

"He's fooled ye wunst," Black Jack reminded him. "Mebbe he'll fool ye some more yet."

He adjusted the coat to cover Scotty's head, and the boy felt himself pushed forward; then his feet were striking some harder substance than the out-

side sod and he was going down a gradual slope. He stepped along very cautiously; several times he was jerked into a changed direction, and several times he stumbled into hard rocks that told him that he must be inside the cave which his captors had spoken about.

"Here we are," said the doctor. "Take that thing off his eyes, Jack."

Scotty opened his eyes and noted that he was in a most dismal cavern, yet a place that had been used for human habitation, judging by the old furniture that was scattered around.

"Sit down," ordered the doctor, pointing to an old chair. "You've given me a lot of trouble, my boy. Now that we are here together in comfort, I hope you will decide to be sensible and make no further opposition."

Scotty answered not a word. His lately sharpened brain had almost reached the climax of its powers. He was bewildered and frightened; so much of each that it would be hard to say which sensation affected him most profoundly.

"Kid seems kinder dopy," said Black Jack. "Is he out'n his head."

"He's stubborn," said the doctor. "It won't do him any good. He is going to give me that com-

bination to the safe and then I'm going to go over to the sanitarium, through the underground passage. I hope I'll have better luck than we had when this kid caught us the other night."

"What ye plan to do over there?" asked Black Jack.

"I'm planning to do plenty," the doctor replied. "I'll take a few pop sticks over with me. I'll put one where it will wreck their electric light plant, and another where it'll spoil their water main. Then I'll open that safe and get the valuable box I've told you about; enough money to make both of us rich. Then I'll come back here and we'll pack up and get down the river in your boat. But before we do that, I'll have to look after things long enough for you to go back to the landing and fix their boat so she won't be any good."

Scotty stirred at these words; he scowled threateningly at the doctor but said not a word.

"Where's that combination to the strong box?" asked the doctor.

Scotty made no reply.

"Speak up," ordered the doctor. "You know what I want. You didn't run away with that safe combination just so you could lose it. You've been carrying it ever since. You have it now!"

Still Scotty said not a word. He was beginning to recover himself a little. He knew what the doctor wanted. The man wanted the figures and letters that were on the linen slip that was sewed inside the pocket of his shirt. But he should not have them. He was too confused now to remember just what was at stake. But anyway, this man was an enemy to Mr. Eastcome and Seth; and—yes, he had planned to wreck the *Ozark!*

That was the thought than ran riot in Scotty's mind now. These men had planned to wreck the *Ozark*. They were enemies and traitors. Was he —Scotty—a coward? He was not! He would show the whole world that he was not a coward!

Scotty never did reply to the doctor's questions. He seized the back of the old chair and gripping it in both hands raised it above his head and brought it crashing down upon the doctor. He had no chance to repeat the blow. Black Jack was upon him in a moment, striking at him with some metal instrument that he held in his hand. He wrenched Scotty's arm back until there was a snap of bone; then he flung him to the ground bleeding and, mercifully, unconscious.

CHAPTER XIX

CHARLIE BAXTER TO THE RESCUE

Charlie Baxter was a true child of the woods. When he wanted to get up at a certain hour he did so: he needed no alarm clock to awaken him. Thus it was that at one o'clock of the night of Scotty's adventures Charlie woke up and went outdoors to see why Scotty had not called him.

It was bright moonlight by this time, and it seemed clear that the boy should be seen easily enough if he were within range. Failing to find him, Charlie went to look at his bunk, on the bare chance that Scotty might have turned in without giving him any notice. The bunk was empty. In the next one big Seth lay at his ease, his long frame stretched full length. Charlie knew that it had been a hard day for Seth, and was not surprised to find that he paid no attention whatever to the intrusion.

"It would take more noise than I'm likely to make to rouse him to-night," said Charlie to himself. "All of these boys are tired. I'm not going to stir them all up on a false alarm. The chances are

that Scotty has taken a rest somewhere and gone to sleep on the job. I'll just take a look around for him."

Charlie walked all around Wildheath Ranch without seeing anything of the missing scout. He looked in the general direction of the dock and saw that the *Ozark* seemed to be quiet at her moorings. Then he looked over to the Palace.

At first he saw nothing suspicious, but as he neared the building he saw the figure of a man suddenly rise from a stooping position. Charlie was not very far away so he stepped quietly towards the place to see what was being done. When he got near enough he saw that the man was doing something with a spade and the building near which he was working was the electric power house. Apparently he had just finished his work, for, as Charlie drew near, he straightened up and entered the building through one of the rear doors.

Charlie realized the possibility that this man might be Mr. Jillson or one of his helpers doing some really necessary work. But he did not think it likely. His pulses throbbed so that his head ached, as he edged over to the place where the man had been working. He was not surprised to find dynamite planted there, with a slow fuse attached.

There was black villainy being attempted at Wildheath Sanitarium that night.

What should Charlie Baxter do? The fuse being quenched and the dynamite safe in his own possession, there was no danger of an explosion. Why not follow this man up and find out who he was? It would be of inestimable value to discover, once for all, the perpetrator of these mysterious attacks. It would be of tremendous value to Mr. Eastcome and Doctor Pingree. And if this was to be done, it must be done right at this moment, and done so stealthily that the culprit would have no warning.

Still gripping his dynamite, Charlie tried the door which he thought had been opened by the object of his pursuit, found it still open, and quietly entered the house. He tiptoed carefully along, for it was much darker inside than it had been under the clear moonlight outdoors. Then he saw a light ahead, and following this, he was able to reach a large hall. Installed in one of the walls was something like a big safe, such as Charlie had seen in some of the houses of business at Little Rock. There, kneeling before the safe, engrossed in working out its combination from a slip of paper that lay before him, was the man who had been digging.

The man was apparently no novice in dealing with strong boxes and their combinations. Even as Charlie watched he secured the right combination and managed to pull open the heavy door. Evidently there was no alarm connected with it, for it opened without a sound. Charlie could see that a metal box was prominent in the contents, and into this box the dynamiter began to crowd a lot of papers that he picked up from certain shelves that lined the walls of the safe.

He was evidently in a great hurry, whoever he might be. He did not wait to make a clean job of it. A hasty selection and he jammed shut the lid of the metal box, picked it up in one arm, and backed away from the safe, closing its massive door as he stepped back.

Had he not been so occupied with this door he would have noticed that he almost trod on Charlie Baxter, who had allowed himself to come dangerously close. The boy backed away and stepped into a dark recess. The next minute he was following the thief down some steps towards the basement.

There was a basement door there; the same door through which Scotty had seen his two men disappear on a night not long before. The man had some difficulty in getting through this door, burdened

as he was with the box, so Charlie had time to note it well, and he managed to slip quietly through it, behind the man, before it had really closed.

He was now in the storeroom which contained only a few bottles and boxes. It was quite dark excepting for such light as came from a flashlight carried by the thief. Fortunately for Charlie this was not turned in his direction. Across the room the man set his box down for a minute, felt for some kind of a spring, and pushed aside a secret door in the nature of a panel. As the man pulled himself awkwardly through with his heavy box, Charlie stole cautiously across the room and managed to catch the panel before it was fully closed. He waited quietly a few minutes so that the man on the other side might get on his way, and then, to his great gratification, found that he could open the secret door and follow on.

Once through the door Charlie perceived that he was in some kind of a secret, natural passage. Far ahead he could both hear and see the man he was following, making awkward travel with his heavy box, and using his flashlight to illuminate the way. Charlie felt the panel slide back against his restraining fingers, and for a moment he held on, to keep it from closing entirely. Once it was shut there

was nothing for it but to follow on. It was hopeless to expect that he would be able to find the mysterious spring. He would be shut off from aid!

Then he saw the form in the distance, getting farther and farther away, and his resolution hardened; he steeled himself to follow on and see the thing through. The panel closed, with a little click, and he was shut up to meet his fate.

Charlie gave himself no time for gloomy foreboding. He followed right along after the dim light ahead, soon lessening the distance because he was able to travel much faster than the man with the box. Suddenly the light disappeared entirely, as if the man might have stepped into a room and shut the door. For a moment Charlie was confused. Then it flashed through his mind that a sudden turn of the tunnel, at right angles, would have this effect, for the flashlight was of no great power, and would not carry far at best. Traveling cautiously along by sense of touch, he soon found that his guess had been correct. The passage came to an abrupt turn, and when he had rounded this the light was again visible, this time not so very far ahead. By this time Charlie had collected his thoughts somewhat, and was not quite so mystified. This secret

passage was undoubtedly the one that led to Black Jack's place.

Although he had lived with Black Jack for many years he had never been taken into his full confidence. He knew, in a vague way, that somewhere beneath the island cottage lay a large cavern. He had heard vague stories of a mysterious passage that ran all the way from this cavern on the island to the mainland. He knew that there was an opening to this cavern from a point on the island; in fact, when playing around, as a small boy, he had discovered this opening, though he had not penetrated far into its depths. When he had mentioned it to Black Jack he had aroused such a storm of anger that further inquiries were effectually checked. As he had grown older he had felt that the less he knew about Black Jack's underground matters, the better off he would be.

It was a relief, though, to know his whereabouts, and when he reached a place in the passage through which a few rays of moonlight crept in, he was quite light-hearted again, for he now knew that he had passed through the worst of it, and, if he liked, could find the opening that led out on the island and make his escape.

Charlie did not intend to escape yet, though. He

was of a tenacious purpose and he had determined to see this thing through and see what damage was being done to his friends at the sanitarium by this intruder. So he followed on.

Soon, a light ahead convinced him that the end of the journey was near. He closed up the distance between himself and his quarry and reached a large cave, illuminated dimly by a kerosene lamp, not many steps behind the man with the box.

"Here I am!" the man announced. "I've done my job. Have you put their boat out of business?"

"Just got back a few minutes ahead of you," the familiar voice of Black Jack replied. "The boat's drifted up agen the island now, an' I reckon they'll be putty smart if they git her to goin' agen right soon. I knew the kid wouldn't come around fer a bit so I jes' left him here. I reckon he ain't stirred since I hit him."

Peering into the dim light of the cavern Charlie could see an old cot upon which lay the unconscious form of a boy. There could be no doubt of his identity. It was the missing Scotty; hurt, unconscious, perhaps dead.

Hitherto Charlie had been a cautious scout, trailing his enemy and keeping discreetly in the back-

ground. Now he became a mountain lion, afraid of no one, and ready to scratch and fight in the protection of his kind. He sprang into the light of the cave in a perfect fury.

"Who's been hurting this boy?" he demanded. "Some one will have to pay pretty dearly for this. Why don't you do something for him? What do you mean, letting him lie and bleed to death? I'm a scout. I know my First Aid. Let me do something for him."

"What you doing down here?" demanded Black Jack angrily. "You got no business in this cave an' you know it."

"This kid belong to you, Jack?" asked the other man angrily. "What in time did you let him come here for?"

Charlie perceived that neither of the men had any thought that he had tracked this adventurer all the way from the Palace grounds. They supposed that he had blundered in there from the island entrance.

"Never mind how I came," he cried. "I'm going to give some help to that boy. You stand there and see him lie so quiet and unconscious, perhaps dying, and never raise a finger to help him. You aren't men. I think you must be devils!"

"Stow your gab, kid; and stay away from that boy. I'm a doctor. I can bring the youngster to himself in a minute. But I won't do a thing unless you stand away."

"Is he a doctor, Jack?" he asked.

"Sure," nodded Jack carelessly. "It's Doc Temperby, as used to be at the Palace. You'd orter know him."

Charlie looked at the black-visaged adventurer and recognized him. The doctor had worn a full beard when at the sanitarium but there was no mistaking him. He was already administering some potent remedy to Scotty, and it was but a few moments until the poor boy revived; but even then he was very sick.

Charlie went over and sat down on the edge of his cot.

"Don't be scared, Scotty," he said. "There's nothing going to happen to you."

"They can't do any worse'n kill me," moaned Scotty. "I reckon they done busted me mos' to pieces, anyway. But I didn't tell 'em anything."

His sound arm reached to the pocket of his shirt.

"They got it, Charlie!" he cried. "They got the paper away f'm me. That was the doctor, that

was! He'll be gettin' away an' stealin' everything."

"Never mind, Scotty," said Charlie soothingly. "I'll look after you."

Black Jack and the doctor had been talking together a few feet away. Now they approached the boys and stopped their conversation.

"Better be careful what you're trying to get away from this boy," warned Charlie. "He has friends who won't rest day or night until they've found you."

"Shut up!" ordered the doctor fiercely. "I've a notion to give you just the same dose we had to give him. Here you've come along, just when you weren't needed, and made an awful mess of things. Only thing to do is to take you down the river too. If you were my brat, I'd kill you."

Charlie was genuinely surprised that Black Jack should endure such remarks without a protest. He had never had any cruelty from the islander in all the years that he had lived with him.

"Do you hear what he's saying, Jack?" he cried. "You tell him that he can't touch either one of us. Tell him that he's a thief and I know it. Tell him to get away from here while he has a chance."

Black Jack made no answer, except to go over to Scotty's cot and look at the boy.

The doctor picked up the box that he had brought from the strong box at the sanitarium and prepared to start back along the passage to the opening on the island.

"We haven't time to fool around, Jack," he said. "Tell that brawling youngster of yours that if he doesn't come quietly I'll blow the top of his head off. You pick up the other boy and bring him along. If we don't get started down the river mighty soon we shan't be able to make it. Come along, now."

"Jack, you won't pay any attention to what he says!" cried Charlie.

But it seemed that Jack would pay attention. He still maintained a sullen silence, but he turned Scotty over on his side and was evidently debating the most favorable way of carrying him.

Charlie was desperate. It would be awful for Scotty to have to be moved in this brutal way, in his present condition. It was a terrible thing to see that doctor going off with the box containing all those stolen valuables, no matter whether they were Scotty's or the property of Mr. Eastcome. If only he had a weapon.

Then he became conscious of the stick of dynamite that he still held firmly in his right hand. If any action was to be taken it must be done promptly.

Already the doctor was moving down the passage with his box. Already Black Jack was trying to handle Scotty who had again lapsed into unconsciousness. Charlie Baxter, the little hunchback, faced the great moment. His courage did not fail. Following the doctor into the passage he flung the stick of dynamite, which still bore the cap and partly burned fuse, as far ahead of him as possible.

There was a mighty crash. It seemed as though the whole cave had collapsed!

CHAPTER XX

ON THE TRAIL OF THE MISSING SCOUTS

When Seth turned in after putting Scotty on guard he was too tired to allow his misgivings to keep him awake, and slept even more soundly than usual. At the first break of day he was up, but Ping was ahead of him and was just rushing back from the river.

"Something's up," he shouted to Seth. "The motor boat's broken loose and is thrown up on the north end of the island."

Seth raced to the river bank. Off on the north bank of the island he saw the grounded motor boat. How badly damaged it was he could only guess. The boys returned slowly, trying to ferret out the mystery. As they entered the ranch house, the telephone rang on the private line from Wildheath Lodge.

"Say, is that you, Seth? This is Jillson," said the voice. "Some rascals managed to blow up our water main last night. Can you send us some laborers to help?"

"All right, we'll do what we can," said Seth. Then he turned to Ping. "Where's Scotty and Charlie? Let's see what they have to say about this mystery."

But their hunting availed nothing. The two boys had disappeared as completely as if they had been swallowed up in the night.

It seemed incredible that both of the scouts placed on guard could have disappeared without any one having been disturbed by their outcries, but at last Seth was obliged to carry his bad news to the owner of Wildheath.

"It's at such times as this that your scout training ought to be worth something, if only to help you keep your heads," said Mr. Eastcome. "Let's get the whole jolly show out in front of us, see what we have to face, and then face it."

"The most important thing is that Scotty and Charlie Baxter have been carried off," said Seth.

"Very well. What would we better do about that?"

"Get on their trail any way we can. I've sent word for Elijah Bainscot and his son Job to come and help. They are old woodsmen and they know every inch of this territory."

"That's a good idea. While waiting for them,

how about doing something to help Jillson out with his damaged water main?"

"All the spare hands have already gone down to help. Jillson isn't going to try to make extensive repairs just now. He has extra material and will lay a temporary main around the blowup. He says it won't take him long to get everything in working order."

"That's doing fine. What's the next item on our jolly little bill of damages?"

"The next may be the most serious of all from a business standpoint. The motor boat is loose from her moorings and cast up on the north end of the island. The extent of the damage is only a matter of guesswork, but it is undoubtedly the trick of some enemy, and it's fair to assume that they've done us as bad a turn as possible."

"That is bad. If we can't get the boat in good shape, we can't fill our agreement with Dorsey Brothers. In that case we shall have the best part of our berries rotting on our hands. But it seems to me that Jillson will be the best judge of the damage. Suppose you get word to him to come up here and see what he can do to make our boat fit to navigate just as soon as he finishes his water-main job."

"Yes, sir, I'll do that. I'll go over there myself."

"I'll go with you," said Mr. Eastcome. "This thing takes on a serious aspect, and I'd like to talk it over with Doctor Pingree."

They found Doctor Pingree actively at work with the gang of men who were working on the water main. When he saw Mr. Eastcome he came over to talk with him.

"We'll fool them again," he said. "The way things are going, Jillson will have our water rushing through the new main inside of an hour, and by the time our patients are ready for their morning water supply, they can get it. But all of these crooked attempts make me anxious. They *must* stop."

"I'm wondering if I can't throw some light on the subject," said Seth. "I've kept quiet so far because of a promise I made, but perhaps I was foolish. This boy Scotty was very badly scared the first night he was here. He told me it was because he had just seen 'the doctor' and he believed the doctor would kill him. I thought he was crazy. That was the night the shots were fired, and it was also the night the electric lights at the Lodge were tampered with. Later on I saw Scotty attacked by

a man. He insisted it was the 'doctor.' I still thought he was crazy. About that time the gorilla appeared. Yesterday a man rode with us to Greenripe. When he left us I thought I recognized the man who tried to beat Scotty. He got to Greenripe yesterday and last night all this trouble came along."

"Describe your man, Seth," said Doctor Pingree, eagerly.

"Well, he was a man of middle age. He was rather stout but looked quite strong and active, though too heavy to run much. He wore no beard or mustache but he was very dark and had a beard line so heavy that it made his face look black even when he was shaved close. He spent most of his time yesterday with Mr. Jillson's engine, so Jillson would know him."

"That description is good enough for me," said Doctor Pingree. "I know who the fellow is. It is Doctor Temperby, my predecessor. Scotty was right. He's the man Mr. Eastcome was bound to get rid of, and evidently he is trying to wreck the institution by way of revenge. Don't you think it is Temperby, Eastcome?"

"It sounds like him," said Mr. Eastcome. "And that fellow would be dastardly enough to do any-

thing. If I had known he was around, I would not have slept much."

"I'm sorry now that I didn't insist on telling you all about the other doctor as soon as Scotty spoke of him," said Seth. "But he made me promise not to tell, and I thought he had to be humored. The fact is, he rambled along so wildly that I just thought he was out of his head. He said he was a very wealthy boy who had been kept at the Palace by the doctor so he could work him for his money. Well, I supposed the doctor he talked about was Doctor Pingree, and I knew he wouldn't do anything of the kind. Anyway, Scotty didn't look like money or anything resembling it, so I made up my mind that he had been treated so badly it had made him a little queer."

"The doctor he meant was Doctor Temperby, who was here until Mr. Eastcome sent him off about a year ago. I was at Bridgetown Sanitarium for three years after I left Bushville. Mr. Eastcome heard of my work at Bridgetown and sent for me to come after he discharged Doctor Temperby.

"Yes, he's a bad one, this Temperby. He used to be superintendent there at the Palace. I found he had been doing some crooked work, imposing on one of the patients who was not very strong-minded.

I got all the evidence and came here to have him arrested, but he got away. He had just been having a new strong box built for himself in the Palace. That must be the safe that the boy meant, for the thing has never been opened yet. It wasn't mine so I never have touched it, and Temperby doesn't dare to come and try to open it. Besides, it seems the boy has the combination."

"Yes, sir. And perhaps that is why Scotty is being followed by him. If Doctor Temperby can get that combination he'll try to have some one who isn't likely to be arrested come in and open up the vault and take his plunder to him."

"He may be at the bottom of nearly all our recent mysteries," said Doctor Pingree. "Once he threatened to drive all our patients away. So by firing shots promiscuously, turning wild animals loose in the grounds, damaging our electric-light plant and our water system, and doing similar mischief, he would try to get us in bad. I don't know why he should wreck the boat, unless"—

"I think I can see a reason he might have for that," said Seth. "He probably got hold of Scotty and carried him away by slipping down the river in a boat. He wrecked our boat so that we couldn't easily follow."

"That may be the explanation," agreed Doctor Pingree. "But it may be sheer malice, too. He is clever, this Doctor Temperby is, but he is also mean."

"I'm anxious to go back to the ranch house and see what Elijah Bainscot can do for us. It won't be very much if this Doctor Temperby has gone off along the river, but if he hasn't, if he's anywhere in these hills, Elijah will find him."

"You go ahead," said Doctor Pingree. "Just as soon as Jillson has the water running through our main, I'll send him up to see what he can do on the boat."

CHAPTER XXI

THE MYSTERIOUS SIGNAL

When they got back to Wildheath Ranch, Seth and Mr. Eastcome found that not only had the Bainscots come to offer help, but many of the hill people were with them. News had been spread by the scouts that Scotty and Charlie Baxter were missing, and the recently awakened good will of the people was manifested by the readiness with which they came to offer help. It was a great testimony to the value of scouting.

"Where did all these people come from?" exclaimed Mr. Eastcome. "I didn't suppose we had so many neighbors within fifty miles."

"Some of 'em has come quite a piece," explained Elijah Bainscot. "It's yore Wildcat Scouts as brung 'em. Some's fathers, some's mothers, some's aunts and uncles and brothers. We all is hard workers fer our friends."

"You haven't found anything of either Charlie Baxter or Scotty yet, have you?" asked Seth.

"We've found enough to know they was a bit of a scrap right around yore boat landing. The tracks is all clear enough. I reckon the boy Scotty ran down to the landing to warn off somebody f'm fooling with yore boat, then that somebody up an' caught him. 'Cordin' to the tracks, Scotty put up a stiff fight, but he warn't no match fer whosoever it was. They was two of 'em arter him, an' one of 'em was barefoot, prob'ly belonged here. The animile as carried him off warn't no native o' these yere parts. He's wearin' a city shoe an' the heel of it's one o' these yere rubber heels all marked up an' plumb easy to track."

"I know what you mean," exclaimed Seth. "Would you know that heel mark if you saw it some other place?"

"Reckon I would," declared Elijah.

"Well, you come with me right over to the Palace," said Seth. "I want you to see something I noticed while I was over there this morning. I just hope it won't have been tramped out yet by that big crowd."

At the Palace, Seth had no great difficulty in finding traces of the peculiar heel mark.

"That's it," said Elijah. "It's the very same feller. You'd have reckoned anybody would a knowed

better'n put out an advertisement like that when he was up to somethin' kinder crooked."

"Don't suppose he thought anything about it," said Seth. "He's probably used to wearing rubber heels, and it never entered his head that it would be a dead give-away here. And even now we haven't caught the fellow."

"We'll catch him, all right," said Elijah. "See, now, these here marks goes right to the back door of the Palace."

It was true. In the soft earth that led to one of the rear doors of the Palace the peculiar marks were easily seen.

"Say, we ain't th' only ones as seen these yere rubber heels. Look at these here tracks headin' the same way. D'ye know how I c'n tell 'em for to be Charlie's tracks?"

"Sure," said Seth. "I've noticed that one of his shoes is built up with a heavy sole to make up for his one leg being a little short. It's his right leg that's short. That's it. Charlie was right after him."

"Yes, sir, Charlie was right arter him. What's more, Charlie's lived in these hills all his life, an' he knows how to go arter a fellow. But what I got to arsk ye is this: All the tracks is headed to

the kitchen door. What's the fellow as wears the fancy heels doin' goin' there, an' why sh'd Charlie be a chasin' a fellow down this way?"

"Maybe the rubber-heel man is some employee of the sanitarium," suggested Seth. "Maybe Charlie found him doing something suspicious about the water main and chased him right in here."

"Mebbe he did, mebbe he did," admitted Elijah. "But let me arsk ye one more thing. What become o' Charlie? The man with the rubber heels may be hidin' himself, but what become o' Charlie?"

"That's just what we want to find out," said Seth. "I believe we'd better find Doctor Pingree and see if he won't have every one in this big sanitarium, servants and patients alike, come down for inspection. The chap who was wearing the rubber heels probably doesn't even suspect that they may give him away, and if he is staying here, he'll likely fall right into the trap."

Doctor Pingree was easily found and intensely interested.

"That heel mark is quite peculiar," he agreed. "It is made by a patented rubber heel, and the mark that shows so clearly is the trade-mark. First we'll get the help together and examine them. Then we

can easily inspect the patients, because it is time for their morning exercise in ten minutes and every one comes down for that."

The half-dozen attendants had just been released by Jillson from the work of helping repair the water main. Inspection was soon made and gave only a negative result. When the patients gathered for exercise and Doctor Pingree had checked them off to make quite sure that all were present, he directed them to stand in a line and raise first one foot and then the other. They responded promptly, supposing it to be some kind of foot inspection. The result was fruitless.

"That doesn't seem to settle it, though," said Seth. "The man might easily have changed shoes since last night. A lot of them are wearing tennis shoes, anyway."

"While they are out here we will go through every room," said Doctor Pingree.

"I want to do that," said Seth. "If this man has a room here he may have Charlie tied up in it."

"Not a chance of it, son," said Elijah, "not if Charlie was follerin' him up like what I think he was. That boy is strong an' quick an' slippery, an' he's on the watch every minute."

"Well, I'll feel better satisfied if we look through the building, anyway," said Seth.

Under Doctor Pingree's guidance, they searched the enormous building. Seth was amazed at its countless passages and stairways, halls, rooms, and closets.

"It would be easy enough to lose yourself in this place," he said. "And I don't see why it wouldn't be easy to pick out some cubbyhole where a boy that was gagged and tied might be hidden away."

"If they got Charlie gagged an' tied they was more'n one man doin' it," declared Elijah with emphasis. He had known the Hill Scout all of the boy's life and had himself much to do with his training. "I ain't s'prised that we don't find nothing in this Palace. If this feller with the heels had tried any crooked work in here, Charlie would have managed to let somebuddy know 'bout it. You all look around here if you want. For me, I figure them tracks at the ranch house is fresher an' gives more promise'n what ye got here."

"I don't like to give up," said Seth, "but I think I'll go back to the ranch house, too. Mr. Jillson is ready to go over now to see if he can do anything with the boat."

Mr. Eastcome was glad to see them come. For one thing, he had a lot more people there than he knew what to do with. They must be set to doing something.

"Most o' these folks might jes' as well pick berries," said Elijah. "Me an' Job, we'll hunt around yere an' some o' you boys c'n hunt on the island. If we see a stranger of any kind he'll have to make good, an' if he looks anything like that yere Doc Temperby, he'll never git away. We ain't forgot Doc Temperby."

There was plenty of help of every kind now. Mr. Eastcome had all the berry pickers he could use, and they went ahead as if the next shipment was assured. Mr. Jillson was rowed over to the boat to do his best, and with him went Seth, Ping, Pansy, and Shadow to search the island.

The day was bright and hot but they searched furiously, paying no heed to the sweat that soaked their clothing, the brush that tore their hands and faces, or the briars that constantly cut deep into their skin.

Evening drew on. Mr. Jillson, more successful than he dared to hope, had managed to get the boat ready for temporary use and had brought her back to her landing. The berry pickers were load-

ing her, for it would be wicked to allow that luscious crop to spoil.

Seth, Ping, Pansy, and Shadow, gathered at the boat landing in great discouragement, for Elijah and his mates had met with no greater success than they.

Suddenly Ping gave a shout. "Look, Seth!" he cried. "Look, fellows! See that smoke coming from the shack on the island. Look! What does that mean?"

"Means that Black Jack is home and cooking supper, I reckon," replied Shadow. "Good thing he didn't come while we were on the island."

"Look again," said Seth. "Ping is right. That is no smoke from an ordinary cooking fire. It is made to attract attention."

"I don't see how you can tell," objected Shadow. "It is coming from Black Jack's cabin, but we were all over that shack this afternoon and I'm quite sure that nothing bigger than a rat could have escaped our search."

"But that was an hour ago," Ping reminded him. "A good deal can happen in an hour."

"So it can. But why get excited about a little smoke? Probably Black Jack got wet out on the river, and is building a big fire to dry his clothes."

"We'll go see," said Seth. "If Black Jack is home we want to see him to find out what he knows about Charlie. If he is not home, and some one else is making that smoke, we want to know that, too. Besides, that smoke certainly is a signal."

"What makes you so sure of that?" asked Mr. Eastcome.

"I've studied about signals, and so has Charlie. You just keep your eye on that column of smoke for a few minutes. Most of the time it is just a steady column. But now watch it. The column is interrupted! See, it breaks three times in succession! Some one below is smothering it, and he is doing it for a signal. There it is again! Three times the column is interrupted. That isn't just a coincidence. That smoke is nothing less than a call for help!"

It was an impressive and important company that had gathered at the boat landing and now crowded the deck of the *Ozark* for its short trip around to the south of the island. Some one suggested that Black Jack's notorious dislike for company might make it a dangerous visit, but this scarcely seemed likely with that venerable woodsman, Elijah Bainscot, his trusty rifle under his arm, leading the way.

All of the scouts of Ozark Troop, No. 1, were there, that is, all except the missing boys, and there

were several of the grown-ups of the hill people. There were also Mr. Eastcome, Doctor Pingree, and Mr. Jillson.

Smoke was still coming from the chimney of the cabin.

"You, Job, an' Lije, you sneak aroun' an' git a peek in them winders," directed Elijah. "I'll cover that there door."

But the precautions proved quite unnecessary. The cabin was absolutely deserted. There was no fire in it; there was only a cold and empty fireplace. And still the smoke poured out from the chimney above and made its appeal for help.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CAVE GIVES UP ITS SECRET

"That's strange!" exclaimed Mr. Eastcome. "Who ever heard of a smoking chimney from an empty fireplace?"

"It ain't no mystery to me," said big Elijah. "Black Jack took me in to see the place wunst. That smoke come f'm below ground. They's a big cave down thar, an' they's a passage among them there bushes as leads right to it."

He led the way to some bushes that grew close down to the river bank and concealed some massive rocks. The distance from the cabin was about two hundred yards. Pushing aside the bushes he disclosed a natural opening in the rocks. He was obliged to stoop as he entered, but the boys passed the entrance without difficulty. The passage sloped down gradually and soon widened as they pushed forward. The electric torches carried by Jillson and Seth furnished all the light that was needed.

"This here will take us right plumb into the cave," said Elijah. "I reckon Black Jack never made no

entrance f'm his shack fer fear folks might find it too easy. Ain't nobody but him an' me knows that entrance beyont."

Anxiously, yet hopefully, the exploring party hurried along the passage, expecting every moment that it would widen into a cave that would give some explanation of the mystery.

Suddenly Elijah came to a dead halt. "Somethin' wrong!" he exclaimed. "Can't go no furder. They's been a cave-in, an' it ain't more than a day or two old."

It needed no very wise person to see that Elijah was right. Great masses of earth and rock blocked the passage completely. Not even a small boy could get through.

Back in the open air again the party discussed what should be done.

"There's some way down into that cavern," declared Seth. "If we can't find any other way I guess we can get down the same way the smoke comes up."

"That sounds sensible, anyway," agreed Doctor Pingree. "Let us get back to the old cabin and make a thorough search."

There was so little to search in that small cabin that the job was soon done. Evidently there was

no connection with the cavern below save through the chimney.

Jillson seized a heavy iron bar and began to experiment with the back wall of the fireplace. A stone was loosened and dropped down. Another and then another followed. The aperture was quickly enlarged until it would admit the passage of a man's body. Fortunately, the smoke had greatly diminished.

Scarcely had Jillson begun the work before shouts were heard from below. The voice of Charlie Baxter soon became clearly audible.

"It's a long drop down from the chimney opening," he cried. "It's all of twenty feet. Better get a rope. Send Doctor Pingree down first and have him bring his surgical case."

With curiosity and feverish interest the party made short work of enlarging the opening and getting a stout rope from the boat. Doctor Pingree was the first one down. Seth followed closely as soon as the rope again swung free. The others crowded after as quickly as their agility allowed them to swarm down.

They were surprised by what the light of their torches revealed. A cavernous space stretched back into infinite gloom on every side. It had been used

as a rendezvous of some kind for many years. Rude pieces of furniture were scattered about. On an old couch lay the bulky form of a man. A little removed from him Scotty was doing his best to sit up on an old cot, his arm in a sling and a bandage around his head.

Black Jack sat gloomily on a box, his famous rifle useless at his feet. Steadying the end of the rope, eagerly watching their descent and welcoming each one as he came, was Charlie Baxter.

"Oh, but I'm glad you've come!" he cried. "It seems days and days since I saw any of you. I can't tell you how good you look. Doctor Pingree, that man on the couch is the one who needs you."

"It's Temperby!" exclaimed Doctor Pingree, bending over the man. "He's losing blood."

"While Doctor Pingree is fixing him up, you tell us all about it," suggested Seth. "How's Scotty? He looks bad, too."

"You lie down again, Scotty," Charlie insisted. "I'm afraid Scotty has a broken arm and he has a bad cut on his head. But he'll get over it, all right."

"How did it all happen and how did you get into this dark hole?" demanded Seth.

"It's all my fault," Charlie explained. "For a while I was afraid that we never would get out. It

seemed like I'd spoiled everything and we were going to have to die here. It's a long story but I can tell you something about it before Doctor Pingree gets ready for Scotty.

"You see, Scotty went on guard first. I woke up at one o'clock to take my turn. By that time Scotty had gone down to the boat landing and they had overpowered him and carried him to the island. But I didn't know that.

"Of course when I got out I wondered where Scotty was. It was bright moonlight and I could see almost as well as day. I didn't want to wake up a lot of tired people if it wasn't necessary, so instead of giving the alarm about Scotty's disappearance I decided I'd make a complete round of the place looking for him. That was my first mistake.

"When I got over near the Palace I saw a man doing something with a spade near the electric power house. He was just leaving. I edged over in the shadow and when I got there I found he had planted a stick of dynamite so that it would blow up the electric plant. I extinguished the fuse and pulled the dynamite loose. I knew that he had disappeared into the building, and as I found one of the rear doors open I guessed he had gone in there, and followed on tiptoe, carrying the dynamite in my hand.

"Right there I made my second mistake. I ought to have roused the house, but I just thought that here I was, a scout of Round Table Patrol, getting some most tremendous adventures, and if I was worth my salt, I would see them through on my own account."

"You surely did make a mistake in that," Seth observed. "Scouts don't do that way at all. But go ahead!"

"Well, I found this man in a big hall, kneeling before a monster safe and working at some kind of knob. He had the door open in just a minute, and dragged out a heavy box. Then he pushed the door shut and almost stepped on my toes going past me on his way back.

"I suppose I surely ought to have shouted, but it was a terribly ticklish thing to do right then, with him so near to me, so I just followed him to see what he did with the box. He went down some steps to the basement and disappeared through a cellar door. I slipped in after him and found him in some kind of dark storeroom. He was using his flash light but didn't turn it my way. He went over to one end of what looked like a solid wall, worked with it a minute, and a door opened. Through this he disappeared.

"I was all in darkness now, but my sense of direction is pretty good, so I was over at that place almost as soon as he left it, and somehow I found that secret door without trouble. It was a panel and opened into a dark passage, a kind of natural tunnel. I could see and hear him making his way ahead of me.

"He was stumbling along, making poor time with the awkward box, so I had no difficulty in getting close to him. I was pretty sure that I was in a natural underground passage, and I guessed that it passed under the river bed over to the island. You see, I'd heard a vague story of it long ago, though I had never really known it. I knew very well that there was a big cave beneath Jack's cabin and I knew that one entrance to it was from a passage opening out on the river bank, but I had also heard of a passage going clear under the river. I had never inquired into these things because when I was little I was afraid of Jack, and as I got older I decided that if any troublesome investigations ever came, the less I knew the better. That was another mistake.

"Well, I followed quietly along, and after a long trip I knew we had reached the island because there was one place where some faint moonlight showed

and I guessed it was the opening at the river bank. Then we got to the cave and I saw Jack and Scotty. Poor Scotty was looking pretty bad. He must have put up an awful fight when Doctor Temperby tried to get him, and nothing had been done yet to take care of him.

"It just made my blood boil to see him lying there looking so bad. I wasn't a bit afraid of Jack and I decided that neither this black-faced man nor any one else should keep me from looking after my brother scout. So I stepped into the cave, right into the light of the old kerosene lamp and said that I wanted to know who had been hurting that boy, and that I proposed to use what knowledge I had to give him first aid."

"Of course you didn't know then that Temperby was a doctor," said Seth.

"No, but it didn't take him long to tell me that he was, and that he would give the boy all the attention he needed. He was awfully mad, because he said my coming had spoiled everything, and now they would have two boys to carry down the river with them instead of one.

"I said to Jack, 'You aren't going to let him carry us away from here, are you?' But Jack had one of his sullen spells, and he wouldn't answer me. I saw

very soon what was going to happen. The doctor bandaged Scotty up, then he picked up the box and said: 'We must be getting away, Jack. You bring the two kids.'

"I was desperate. Here this villain was carrying Scotty off, and getting away with the money he had stolen, and all because I hadn't had sense enough to give the alarm. In a few minutes we would all be loaded in a boat to be carried down the river.

"The doctor was already in the passage with his box, and Jack had started to pick Scotty up, when suddenly I realized that I still held in my hand the stick of dynamite. I could keep that man from getting away by destroying the passage!

"Without waiting another second I rushed after him, and threw the dynamite as far down the passage as I could. The next instant there was a mighty crash and it seemed as if the whole cave were falling in.

"When I got over the shock I realized that the smash had not damaged the cave, but it had blocked the passage from the tunnel and the outside entrance completely, and the doctor was in the ruins. We managed to drag him out and get him to that couch, but he hasn't really been conscious since.

"That was hours and hours ago. Jack doesn't know yet what caused the disaster. He has been trying plans to get out all day, but about an hour ago he gave up and agreed that I might use my smoke signals. So here you are, and I never was so thankful in my life!"

Jillson had rigged a chair by means of which Scotty could be hoisted up the chimney comfortably. Then the scouts of Round Table Patrol and the scouts of Wildcat Patrol were all invited by Mr. Eastcome to Wildheath Ranch for a rest and a good square meal.

CHAPTER XXIII

PRESENTS FOR SCOTTY

The second trip of the *Ozark* to Little Rock was made on time, after all. Seth and his mates were tired and worn with the excitement and work of the day, but they were not of the "give up" type. They had agreed that a load of strawberries should be ready for Dorsey Brothers in two days, and they would keep the contract if humanly possible.

Seth had promised that the second load should be even bigger and better than the first, and the commission men gladly admitted that he had made good. While it was yet early in the morning every crate was taken. Orders for the next supply were eagerly given. It was a good piece of work.

"I'm going to take all of you boys to breakfast," said the senior Mr. Dorsey, when the work was done. "I've ordered something very special at the Hotel Marion. I want every one of you to come. Real Southern breakfast, I promise you."

"Some one will have to stay to guard the boat,"

said Charlie Baxter, who had insisted on making the trip in spite of his strenuous day.

"You're right," agreed Seth. "Can't take any chances, even if Doctor Temperby has gone out of business. We'll have to have a guard. How about you, Pansy?"

Pansy hesitated a moment. A real Southern breakfast was a terrible temptation. He won, though.

"It's just as you say, Seth," he replied, rather red in the face. "You're the captain."

Seth laughed a long, hearty roar, and threw himself across Pansy's sturdy shoulders.

"Good old Pansy!" he chuckled. "Did you think I'd spoil your eats? Mr. Dorsey's own watchman is going to stand guard. We'll all go to the Marion together. I only wish Scotty could be here, too."

"I'm afraid it will be a long time before Scotty gets any such treat, from what my uncle thinks of him," said Ping.

"Is there danger that he won't get well?" asked Shadow.

"No. I guess the doctor thinks he will get well all right. But he's going to have a hard fight of it. His arm is broken, and he's lost a lot of blood,

and he had quite a high fever, uncle said. It's pretty tough for poor old Scotty."

"I'm going to get something to take back to him from Little Rock," said Charlie.

"So am I," came in quick chorus from the others.

The Hotel Marion being but a short distance from Dorsey Brothers, it was not long before the boys and their two hosts were seated at a table set with all the elegance of which the hotel was capable. If Charlie Baxter were awed at the silver and glass, the spotless linen, the numerous utensils of which he could not even guess the purpose, he was not alone. Excepting for Pansy Flowers, who had made some excursions into the world with his father, none of the boys had ever visited a modern hotel. Pansy had a little experience, but he was so anxious for the food to be served that he had no time to impress his companions with his superior knowledge. Fortunately Mr. Dorsey had ordered breakfast for all alike, so the boys were spared the embarrassment of menu cards. The service was in the hands of two experienced waiters, and once it was begun all restraint was lost in epicurean delight.

"Oh, boy, that was some breakfast!" exclaimed Pansy, lingering with loving appreciation over the last morsels. "Did we get this because of straw-

berries; or because we broke up the Temperby outfit; or because of Round Table Patrol?"

"You got it because my brother is a regular loon about boys," said the younger Dorsey. "He would rather do something to please a boy than make the best business deal that comes in a season's work. And seeing good, clean scouts, like you Round Table bunch, does him more good than Christmas."

"You tell him our feelings surely are mutual," said Pansy. "If more men like him knew more boys like us, and more boys like us got to know more men like him, there would be a lot more good business men growing up to do business like men like him to do business; if you understand what I mean."

"Well; it's a little complicated, but I believe I do understand," laughed young Dorsey. "I'm a scoutmaster myself. Some day I'll get a boat and carry my White Elephant Patrol up the river to visit your Round Table Patrol, and your Wildcats, too."

"There's going to be another patrol pretty soon," added Ping. "There's a bunch of fellows right now working up the Mountain Lions."

"We'll have quite a powwow," said the scoutmaster.

Little Rock is not a city in which one is likely

to get lost so long as one's ramblings are confined to its main streets, so no restrictions were placed upon the scouts, beyond the single one that all must be aboard the *Ozark* by ten A. M.

Seth was the first aboard. He carried a package that indicated a visit to a book shop. No one need have doubted that his choice for cheering Scotty back to health lay in books, and one might have guessed that they were large books and bravely illustrated.

When Shadow came he also had a package. It was a foregone conclusion that his choice would be practically the same as that of Seth, so one who knew that Seth's package came from a bookstore would be sure that Shadow's had the same origin.

Ping's purchase had been made at a men's outfitting store. He had spent a good part of his loose change in buying collars and neckties that he thought Scotty could wear. He knew something about the deficiencies of Scotty's wardrobe. As a matter of fact, most of the clothing that had contributed to the improvement in the waif's personal appearance had come from the well-filled clothing roll that had been prepared by Pingree's mother before they journeyed away from Bushville.

Charlie Baxter also had a gift of clothing. He

had managed to persuade the proprietor of the clothing store that handled Scout Uniforms to let him have a scout hat and tenderfoot insignia. He, better than any one else, realized how much joy this would bring to the heart of the boy who had been so long an outcast. But Charlie was a sentimentalist; and he also carried a box in which lay three of the most perfect American Beauties, long-stemmed and fragrant in their bed of ferns.

"Where's Pansy, Ping?" asked Seth. "It's two minutes of ten. Didn't he understand that we were to leave at ten."

"He'll be here," said Ping. "Don't be afraid of Pansy. He went after something for Scotty."

"So did all the rest of us," replied Seth. "But here he comes now, so we'll forgive him."

Pansy was coming at a quick, yet careful trot. Zealously he guarded in his two hands a package that seemed to contain something very round and very fragile.

"Sorry, fellows!" he gasped, pretty well out of breath. "I've been getting something for Scotty."

"Well, you took your time," said Seth. "However, you're here before we started. Set down your package and get busy."

"It's kinder fragile," said Pansy. "I want to

put it in a real safe place, where it won't get crushed."

"Give it to me," said Seth. "I'll lock it up."

"No. I don't reckon I'd better trust you," objected Pansy.

"Very well. Don't!" replied Seth. "What's in your old package, anyway?"

"It's a secret," said Pansy. "It's for Scotty."

"Put it in that locker in the chart room and get busy," ordered Seth. "You aren't the only one who has a secret. Let's go."

It was evening when they got back to the rest and peace of Wildheath Ranch. Never had the place looked so inviting. They had been doing hard work without proper rest and every one of them felt equal to sleeping out a week's vacation.

"Do we have to go on guard to-night?" Shadow asked Seth, as they tied up the boat at the dock.

"What do you say as to that, sir?" asked Seth of Doctor Pingree, who had come down to meet them.

"I think every one of you boys should have a good bath, eat a light meal, and then turn into a good bed and sleep about twelve hours," replied the doctor. "If any guarding is to be done, the Wildcat Scouts will do it. But Black Jack has gone off and

is not likely to return, and Doctor Temperby is in no condition to make trouble for any one."

"How is Scotty to-night?"

"He is just holding up, that is all. I have put his arm in good shape and think it will be as well as ever. But he is quite delirious. You thought him unbalanced when he told facts as they were. You would certainly think him crazy now."

"But he will get all right again?"

"I think that he will. And we must make it our business to see that he not only gets well, but better than ever. There's a long pull ahead of him, though."

"We all want to see him the very first minute that we can. We have some things for him. Pansy has a surprise and Charlie has some flowers."

"Charlie's flowers shall go into his room right now. I'm afraid the surprise will have to keep."

"I reckon it will," said Pansy. "If it isn't too long, it'll be all the better for keeping."

As Mr. Eastcome appeared on the scene Doctor Pingree repeated to him the prescription that he had just made for the boys.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Eastcome. "As you Yankees would say, you know, Doctor Pingree is the doctor. What he says is the thing that goes.

You need a jolly good sleep, every jolly one of you. I give you my word that my friend Elijah Bainscot is able to do all the guarding needed for to-night. To-morrow will be another day. That rascal Temperby managed to lose one perfectly good metal box containing many valuable papers—very valuable to our fine lad Scotty. Temperby is none too sound of wind and limb at present, so we have not done much towards finding that box. To-morrow you shall all help. But, again I say, to-morrow is another day."

Never were boys so glad to put aside adventure and settle down to quiet sleep. Seth, alone, was admitted for a few minutes to the room in the Palace where Scotty lay so ill. He felt a great tenderness for the boy, as he saw his pale face, only a small part of which showed out from the white bandages which so nearly matched in color, and the helpless arm, bound up in plaster of paris.

"It was my fault," he said to Doctor Pingree. "I ought not to have left the little chap on guard. If he doesn't get well I shan't be able to forgive myself."

"Don't feel that way," advised the doctor. "You did what seemed best. And he will get well, too. When he does we will all help to build him up."

"I'll surely do my best," said Seth. "He is reaching out his well hand. Do you think he wants something."

"He is not conscious," said the doctor. "But take his hand, and say in as natural voice as you can, 'Everything is all right, Scotty. Seth is right here, and he is going to look after you until you are well.' "

Seth repeated the words, keeping a firm grip on Scotty's hand, and fancying that the pressure was returned in some degree.

"It will help him," said Doctor Pingree. "We don't know how much or how little reached his clouded brain; but I feel sure that it will help him."

"I'd be glad to sit up all night if it would help," Seth offered.

"No. I don't think it would, Seth. Go to bed and get the rest you need. To-morrow you will need your strength to guard this boy's interests in looking after the lost box, and you may have the gratification of finding him conscious. But go to bed now."

Seth went to his room, but, before he turned in, he spent some earnest moments on his knees at the side of his bunk, begging the Giver of all Good that

He would bring this boy who had suffered so much back to health and reason; and would let him live many days in which he might learn the real, true things of life.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COURAGE OF OZARK TROOP

Seth's first act in the morning was to visit the hospital ward at the sanitarium to inquire after the welfare of Scotty.

"He had a good night and seems much better this morning," said the head nurse. "You may just take a peep inside, but don't let him see you. See, I have put the flowers one of your scouts brought from Little Rock right by his bed. He asked to have them where he could see them. The other things that were brought will have to be given later on. One of them is a surprise."

"That's from Pansy," said Seth. "But I can guess what it is. I'm mighty glad Scotty is doing better. Tell him we are all coming to see him as soon as we are allowed."

Seth was turning away when he came face to face with Doctor Pingree.

"I'm glad Scotty is better," he said.

"Yes, Scotty is better," said Doctor Pingree. "But I can't say that of all my patients. I'm afraid

Doctor Temperby won't last the day. The best hope for him would be a transfusion of blood, but I don't know who will be the donor."

"Would it be likely to help if blood were transfused?"

"It wouldn't be sure, but it's his best chance. You see, some deep vessels were opened in that accident and he lost a lot of blood. I'm by no means sure that he can win through even if the blood is given, but I'm quite sure that he won't otherwise."

"I'll be the donor, if mine will do," said Seth quietly. "It seems a terrible thing for a man like him to die without having a chance."

"I'm glad you feel that way, Seth. I'll test your blood and if it is right for mixing with his, we will do the transfusion as soon as we can get at it. Even though the man is a criminal we must do our best for him."

In one hour the operation was over. Seth had given more than a pint of his blood to the man who had been their enemy. They lay side by side in the quiet surgical ward. Seth, a little dizzy and faint, dropped off to sleep.

It was early afternoon when Seth awakened, feeling quite like himself. He observed that he still lay within a few feet of the hospital bed that held

Doctor Temperby. The man's black beard seemed to intensify the deadly pallor of his waxen face. He was awake and motioned to secure Seth's attention.

"Draw over this way," he whispered. "I want to tell you something."

Seth knew no reason why he should not sit up, so he moved a chair to the man's bedside.

"I know what you've tried to do for me," said Temperby. "It's Christian. If I'd been like that I would have been a happy man to-day. But I'm afraid I'm going to go, anyway. And I want to tell you about that boy. His real name is James Enderscot Albuth, though he has been called Scot or Scotty all his life. His father was a poor man with rich relatives. After the father and mother were both dead, one of these rich relations found the boy and found that he was in bad condition. This man had been a patient of mine, so he brought the boy to the sanitarium so that I might build him up, and both of them stayed here with me. I learned all about their affairs. Unfortunately the man died. I got myself appointed guardian, and the temptation to steal the boy's wealth was too much for me, for my life had been a long way from a straight one for many years. You know about the

safe deposit vault that was built. I want to tell you that all of the boy's papers are there, excepting those I had with me when the cave fell on me. He has no living relatives. He has wealth. I'm only getting what I deserve, and it's a good thing for the boy that he is passing from my hands into yours. I wanted to get that much off my mind. I've got plenty to answer for, anyway. Call that nurse and I will make a statement before both of you that the boy known as Scotty is James Enderscot Albuth."

Seth did not know how important this might be, but as the nurse was in the room he called her and took down the doctor's statement, using her for a witness.

Seth walked slowly out of the ward, anxious to get away from a scene of such distress, since he could not alleviate it. He hoped that he had done no harm in permitting the man to talk. In the office he found Doctor Pingree.

"I feel all right now, Doctor," he said. "Can I go back to work?"

"As well take things easy to-day, Seth," replied the doctor. "I'm afraid our efforts are not going to be successful, but we have done our best."

Seth told him of the statement that Temperby had made.

"Maybe I should have refused to let him talk," he said. "But he was very anxious to do it, and I thought it might be awfully important for Scotty."

"I think it will be," Doctor Pingree agreed. "It is very important to get the boy's identity established in this way. I don't think it has made any difference in Temperby's chances."

Every one was busy at the ranch house. Mindful of the doctor's advice Seth went to his bunk to lie down. There he fell asleep again and it was the gray of early morning when he awoke. At first he was conscious only of a tremendous thirst and a ravenous appetite. Then he saw Doctor Pingree standing near his bunk.

"Sorry to disturb you, Seth," said the doctor. "But we haven't won out with Scotty yet. He went out of his head again last night and he's still raving. Some one was indiscreet enough, yesterday, to tell him that Doctor Temperby was in the same building. He didn't seem alarmed at the time, but it lodged in his mind, and as his fever came up last night he began to show what an impression it had made. I don't think he would recognize you any more than he does the rest of us, but he has always looked to you for help, and you might give it to

his subconscious self even though he doesn't seem to know you."

"I'll go right back with you," said Seth. "We just can't afford to lose Scotty. Everything will seem like a failure if we can't keep him to enjoy his liberty, now that things are clearing up."

The boy was being held in bed by two woman nurses, and at intervals he gave them all they could do. He looked at Seth with wild, unseeing eyes. Not the least gleam of recognition was there.

"He doesn't know me at all!" said Seth, sadly.

"Act just as you would if he did," suggested the doctor. "Speak to him occasionally and put as much cheer and encouragement into your voice as you can. Do all the things to strengthen him, just as you did that first night when you found him hiding from the doctor in the ranch house."

"I will," said Seth confidently. "I'll get through to him some way. I don't think I need any one to help me hold him, and maybe I'd get along a little better if I was just left alone with him."

"There'll be some one within call if you need anything," said the doctor, as he and the nurses withdrew.

Seth slipped off his shoes and coat and settled himself right down on the bed beside the frantic boy.

One of his big hands clasped the uninjured left hand, that was constantly describing circles in the air; the other went tenderly around his shoulders.

"Here I am, Scotty," he said. "Here's Seth. Everything's all right. Don't run away from me any more. Let's go back and get into a warm bed and be comfortable. We aren't afraid of anything, are we, Scotty?"

He was going back to the first night of their acquaintance, the night of the foot race which he had won. "It's only Seth!" he repeated. "No one but your big brother, Seth. You know big, old Seth can take care of you, don't you? Here I am; right here. That's a good old scout! That's the thing, Scotty. Don't forget you are a scout of Round Table Patrol, Scotty. Round Table Patrol is back of you, every single scout. And here is old Seth; right here!"

There was no immediate effect. Scotty still fought and struggled, and gasped. But big Seth never for a moment thought of giving in. Almost in a monotone he continued his soothing, "You know Seth can take care of you, don't you, Scotty. Here's Seth; right here!"

And in less than an hour the struggles began to quiet, the breathing became slower and deeper, the

unintelligible mumbling ceased. Another twenty minutes and the boy lay relaxed, apparently sleeping, his head on Seth's supporting arm.

Hours passed, and Seth did not stir until Scotty showed the first signs of returning consciousness. When he saw that his friend was started on the road to recovery, he slipped away and joined the other scouts who were talking to Mr. Eastcome.

"Hooray!" Seth cried. "Scotty's going to get well."

The boys cheered, and Mr. Eastcome smiled.

"I'm mighty glad to hear that," he said. "I doubt if Scotty knows it, but today is his birthday. Let's see if the boy can be told the good news."

The group tiptoed into the sickroom, and were told that they might talk to him for a few minutes.

"Well, well," Mr. Eastcome said, heartily. "Many happy returns of the day. We've found out many things about you, Scotty. This is your birthday, and we wish you all the luck in the world. I, for one, shall make it my business to see that the birthdays to come are a lot happier than those which have gone before."

Scotty weakly replied; then the party slowly departed so that the boy would not be unduly excited.

Through the work of the Round Table Scouts in

digging into the mysteries of the cave, the date of Scotty's birthday was discovered. The boys found the box which Doctor Temperby had been carrying at the time of the explosion. Its contents established many facts regarding the youth's identity.

It was many days before Scotty was able to celebrate the occasion; but, finally, with his new and real name of James Enderscot Albuth Eastcome (which had been established by the courts), the boy received the heartfelt congratulations of his friends.

"Soon we'll all be starting in the good old truck for Bushville," Seth told him, after the party was over.

"I'm anxious to go with you, Seth," Scotty declared. "I'm getting stronger every day."

"A few more weeks and you'll be ready," Seth said, smilingly.

Finally the time came when the scouts turned their steps homeward. Seth Payson spent half a day overhauling the truck, and putting in some new parts.

"Will it hold six of you?" asked Mr. Eastcome.

"Sure," Seth replied.

"And you think your people will be glad to have Scotty stay with you for a while?"

"They'll want him to stay a year, at least," laughed Seth. "Charlie's coming, too."

When the party was ready to start, Scotty's father promised to come to see him soon. There was no mysterious shot fired as they left Wildheath; no one to warn them against Black Jack. Many were the stops made to say good-by and people were very friendly.

"Going home is almost an adventure in itself, isn't it, Seth?" asked Shadow.

"Yep. The best adventures in the world are back at home."

"For Charlie and me, who have never really had homes, I don't believe we have ever known adventures that will compare with it," said Scotty Eastcome.

Three days later, after a leisurely journey, they drove into the main street of Bushville. The Boy Scouts of Round Table Patrol were home again.

THE END

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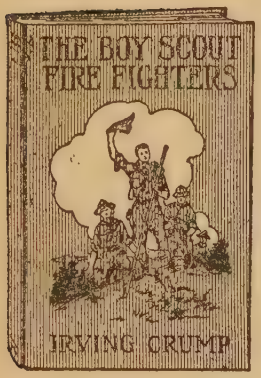

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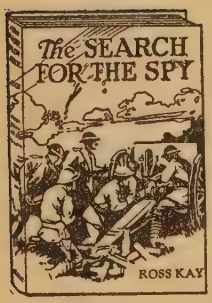

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